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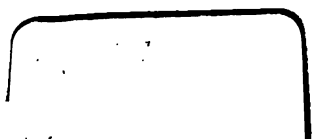
HE COMETH NOT
SILENT

BY
ANNIE THOMAS





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“‘HE COMETH NOT,’ SHE SAID.”



“HE COMETH NOT,’ SHE SAID.”

BY

ANNIE THOMAS,

(MRS. PENDER CUDLIP),

AUTHOR OF “DENIS DONNE,” “PLAYED OUT,” “DOWER HOUSE,”
“A PASSION IN TATTERS,” &C. &C.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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Dedicated,
BY PERMISSION,
TO
LADY ELIZABETH BULTEEL.

March, 1873.

DEAR LADY ELIZABETH,

One of the pleasantest memories I have of my life in Devon is the intercourse I enjoyed there with you. I shall never cease to be grateful for your friendship and hearty sympathy, and for the warm encouragement which you invariably accorded to my literary efforts. I can only hope you will find that this story is not entirely unworthy of the honour you have allowed me to do it, in inscribing your name on its first page.

I am, dear Lady Elizabeth,

Yours very sincerely,

ANNIE THOMAS CUDLIP.

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“‘HE COMETH NOT,’ SHE SAID.”

CHAPTER I.

MADGE RODEN.

THE village lies partly in a shady hot hollow, and partly on a breezy slope that is inclining away to the grand ridges of Exmoor. From some wild deep spring up in those purple heights a river takes its rise, and, after tearing tumultuously through this village of Halsworthy, pours itself a passionate offering into the sea that is lashing the cliffs out yonder.


It is July!—rich, sumptuous July. The

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year has "grown lush in juicy stalks," and the bees are everywhere keeping up a hum about the globes of clover and the waxy-looking pale pink heath that blooms abundantly here. The land is wreathed with flowers, in short; for the soil is fertile, and the love of flowers strong in this locality.

Soft torpor is the normal characteristic of that portion of Halsworthy which nestles away in the hollow. But to-day unwonted excitement, not to say agitation, reigns there. Halsworthy is about to compete with the great world of which it knows so little in the matter of pleasure. It is going to start a cricket, croquet, and archery club; and it is going to commence proceedings to-day.

There is one name on the tongue of every man, woman, and child in Halsworthy to-day, and that is the name of Miss Roden. The



girl finds that life lags more than a little in this sweet sleepy hollow ; and so, in her impatience of this lagging, she has at last incited Halsworthy to bestir itself in the matter of amusements.

She has given up the lawn that stretches away in front of her own picturesque, many-gabled house as the ground for the sports. And now she is standing on the steps just outside the porch, watching them decorate the tent that is to be called a "pavilion," and to be the scene of a "*thé dansant*" with evergreens and purple heather.

She was born and has grown up in this free, invigorating moorland air, and now at twenty she is as full of health and spirit and fearlessness as an Exmoor pony. There is a strong bewitching element of untamed, untrained grace about her, as she suddenly jumps off the steps and walks quickly, with-

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out the faintest indication of Grecian bend, to meet a lady who is slowly coming up the drive.

She wears a dress of some thick white material, cut just short enough in front to show her small, shapely feet. The tone of colour of any thick white material is enough to ruin the fairest complexion; but, though Madge Roden is never called "fair," it does not ruin hers. Her round straight throat does not look brown rising even from the collar of such a dress. And as for her face, few people care to criticise the colour of a countenance that is bright, merry, and frank as a gratified child's. The roundness of youth has not left her cheeks yet. Her eyes have not learned to drop or lower themselves. She gives back look for look without blushing. Indeed, altogether the bloom is very much on this beautiful peach—this girl on whom no

rays that scorch have ever been allowed to fall.

The lady whom she meets a little way down the drive takes her hand, holds her at arm's length, and scans her criticisingly. When the inspection is over, she says,—

“You will do very well, Madge. I like your rose-coloured ribbons and feather.”

“I tried a dozen colours at least before I settled on rose,” Madge answers a trifle repiningly, “and then I felt after all, Who will see me? Who will take the trouble to come to Halsworthy. Mrs. Henderson? do you think anyone will accept our challenges? do you think anyone will come?”

Mrs. Henderson is forty-five. She has a husband, children, a home, a round of duties that must be done, and a few anxieties. Nevertheless, she has the heart of a woman,

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and a great love and sympathy for Madge.
So she says heartily,—

“I hope so, dear—I think so. At any rate, your efforts won’t be unrewarded, for you’ll have given a great deal of pleasure to your old friends in the village ; they will meet here and enjoy themselves even if no strangers come.”

Madge has clasped her hands behind her back. There is a comic expression, half amused, half petulant, on her face. The light breeze that comes down from the hill has wafted a few stray locks of her bronze-brown hair away from the confining pins. Her small, oval, eager face is changing its expression every instant. Her lustrous velvet eyes are lifted, with a look in them that pleads for more sympathy, with her longing for a change, with her craving for something better than she has known. Altogether,

though she is not a beauty, Madge Roden is a very attractive specimen of womankind as she stands here, about to play the part of young lady of the land for the first time.

She is an orphan, this girl who owns Moorbridge House and lands ; and though she has a brace of guardians, and an old aunt of her father lives with her, she is, to all intents and purposes, as free and unfettered as one of the uncaught Exmoor ponies, to which I compared her just now. For three years she has done very much as she pleases with herself and her two thousand per annum. But her flights have been very circumscribed, and she is longing to try her wings.

All the fashion, youth, and beauty of Halsworthy arrive shortly after Mrs. Henderson. Halsworthy is not densely populated with the upper classes ; but still it has its pair of

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surgeons, its lawyer, and its one retired gentleman who has realised fabulous sums in the city. These all have daughters who are delighted to shoot arrows in the air and play croquet. The sons of these respective families are out in the world, naturally, and Halsworthy knows them not.

Madge hurls herself into the task of entertaining her friends ; and, aided by Mr. Henderson (the vicar) and his wife her dear friend, she is succeeding, when a drag comes up, and the arrival of the "Incogniti," who are to play against the "Gentlemen of West Somerset," is proclaimed, Madge's heart thumps with joy. It is going to be a success, this enterprise of hers. If only the Gentlemen of West Somerset would be good enough to come, all would go merry as a marriage bell.

They come at last. The first cricket-

match of the week is played. The "*thé dansant*" goes off in a way that makes it a sweet memory among the maidens of Halsworthy for ever. And the veil of night descends upon enthusiastic pæans of praise and thanksgiving to Miss Roden, the originator of this holiday fête that has been so gloriously inaugurated. When that day's work is quite done, and the evil of forgetfulness cannot be remedied, a thought that would have been such a happy one if it had only flashed across Madge's mind in time, comes into it and tantalises her. And in the act of saying good-night to Mrs. Henderson, she interrupts herself to cry out,

"Oh! why didn't you—*why* didn't you ask your friend's son—that Philip, you know? How could you forget him? and how could I?"

"How remiss!—how stupid I am." Mrs.

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Henderson is as sincerely sorry and mortified about this omission as Madge herself. “Never mind, Madge,” she adds, directly, “I’ll write to-morrow ; and if he can take a holiday, the good, hard-working fellow, he may be here by Wednesday, and enjoy three days of our jubilee.”

After a long search Mrs. Henderson is rewarded by finding the last letter she has received from her old friend Mrs. Fletcher. They have been tender and true friends for thirty years ; but life is too full of work for the great majority, for frequent correspondence in these days. This letter is dated two years ago. The address given is Number 20 in one of the insignificant streets in Chelsea, that do not dare to call themselves a portion of Belgravia. Mrs. Henderson reads the letter over again with interest as keen and fresh as when she

received it. It is full of the praises of Philip —of the good son and brother, whose quiet, unvaunted heroism wins a blessing from his mother every hour of his life.

Presently she gives a pleased shake of the head, and a well-satisfied smile, and says,—

“I *am* justified. A man who has given up a career he loved, as Philip loved the Bar, and has settled down so uncomplainingly to an occupation he must nearly loathe, for his mother’s sake, must deserve even my child Madge. I’ll ask him down : even his goodness will have its reward, if he wins her for his wife.”

So she sits down and writes to Mrs. Fletcher this night, tired as she is, and pleads the cause of the Halsworthy sports and pastimes so cleverly, that it seems as if Philip would be conferring a favour on every

one by coming to be a guest at the Vicarage for so long a time as he can take a holiday. And so the first link in the chain of complications which will ensue is forged by one of the kindest, truest hands in the world.

* * * * *

For the first time for the day, the temperature of the front sitting-room in the little house in which the Fletchers live in Chelsea is pleasant, or, rather, endurable. It is the day after the inauguration of the Halsworthy sports and pastimes. The evening post is just in, and Mrs. Fletcher—Philip’s mother—is in receipt of a letter from her old friend Mrs. Henderson.

Behold her as she sits there in the most comfortable chair in the room—a very old and feeble woman, though she only numbers fifty years. Like her son’s, her nervous system is finely organised, and it has had

some severe shocks from Fate and Fortune. There is a want of power about her muscles, a lack of physical force that makes her children shrink in pain from any mention of the word "paralysis"—although her incapacity for action and exertion has never been broadly called by that name yet.

Those children are about her now, as she finishes reading Mrs. Henderson's letter, and tired with the effort, lets it feebly flutter to the floor. Philip, her son, is reading a newspaper. His occupation as head clerk in an important mercantile house does not leave him much time for even press-literature during the hours of the day.

He is a young man of eight and twenty, neither grave-looking nor endowed with a disappointed expression, though he has relinquished some hopes in life that have been—and still are—desperately dear to him.

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He has a power of happiness and enjoyment about him still. Looking at him as he sits there by his mother, his fair hair tossed off his open brow, his eyes sparkling with his keen sense of the humour of something that is only seen by himself, one feels inclined to endorse Mrs. Henderson's opinion, and declare that he does deserve even such an one as her favourite, the heiress, Madge Roden.

His two sisters, “the girls” as they are called still, though one is twenty-seven and the other twenty-five, are hovering about full of suggestions.

“You might manage it so easily, surely, Phil. Get Roberts to take your work for a week, and give your pupils papers: the holiday would do you so much good.”

“And to feel you were having a holiday would do mamma so much good,” the

younger sister pleads. "Chrissy and I would never let her miss you, would we Chriss?"

Chriss, a determined, good, practical, hard-headed, pretty woman of twenty-seven, takes careful stock of all the possibilities before she answers.

"Mamma wouldn't miss him very much if Cousin Philip stayed here with us while Phil was away: the change to Phil would do her good, wouldn't it, mamma?"

"And Cousin Philip is entirely at your service, now and for ever," a refined full-toned voice says, as a man lounges forward from the darkest corner of the room, and shows himself in the gleam of light that still comes in at the window, without any dread of that light being too fierce for him.

The two girls, Chrissy and Mabel, look at him admiringly, rapturously, gratefully.

Philip Fletcher, their own good, true, thoroughly appreciated brother, is cast in a mould that is very agreeable in the eyes of young womankind. But this cousin of his is just so much taller, handsomer, finer in every way as forces one to see the difference, even when one does not want to mark it. He is quite as clever, too, as Phil—quite as ambitious, quite as attractive. But he lacks all that patient, gallant spirit of self-abnegation which has made Phil sacrifice himself to his mother's real tangible comfort. He lacks all the self-control, all the plodding perseverance, all the higher elements of Phil's nature.

But he is very attractive, very bewildering, very greatly gifted with the power of seeming, and the women are all bewitched by him. Even his old aunt feels as if she could blush with pleasure, when she hears him say that he will willingly stay and play Phil's

part in the household, while Phil goes down to Halsworthy to play croquet and cricket, and to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Henderson's dear child, Madge Roden.

"Though why that young person should be held out as a bait in these days of strikes, and high prices, and general inability to marry and be happy on nothing a year, is incomprehensible to me," he says.

And then he learns for a certainty that Miss Roden has two thousand per annum.

It is a dreadful disappointment to the mother, to the sisters (and to the cousin, he himself affirms), but later that night Phil Fletcher comes to the conclusion that he "can't go to Halsworthy." Another pupil is looming on his horizon. The senior partner of his house wants to get away to Switzerland early this year. He "doesn't see his way out of it all till September.

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he says; and then he kisses his mother and adds,—

"One of the girls must write and tell Mrs. Henderson this as politely as possible, mother. A good thing, too: her child, as she calls this Madge Roden, might entangle herself in my life, and she must fly higher."

The girls have a very full portion of work allotted to them already, in spite of all Phil's efforts to smooth their paths. Chrissy keeps the house, and does daily battle with butcher and baker; to say nothing of the hourly combat that goes on between mind and matter, the former being represented by herself, the latter by the cook and housemaid. Chrissy's time is very fully occupied. She always feels as if so much ground were cut from beneath her feet, when she has to sit down to write a letter. And Mabel, the younger sister, is striving to be independent of

“dear, noble, hard-working Phil.” She gives music-lessons from ten till four, and after four, well ! she is not inclined to rush into a correspondence with a woman who is to her only “mamma’s old friend Mrs. Henderson.”

But Cousin Philip, the handsome idler about town, of whom utter ruin has been prognosticated by discerning friends a hundred times and more,—Cousin Philip, the irresistible scamp of the Fletcher family, comes to the fore on this occasion in a most unprecedented way.

He will write and explain (in his aunt’s name) to Mrs. Henderson that his cousin has no time for Halsworthy, and all the happiness Halsworthy might represent to him. He (in his aunt’s name) undertakes to make the refusal a more gracious thing than the acceptance of the invitation would have

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been. He (in his aunt's name) will take care that Phil's conduct shall shine out more gloriously than ever in Mrs. Henderson's eyes.

Thus much he declares to the mother and the sisters. To his cousin Phil he simply says,—

“I'll put it all so neatly, old fellow, that you will be able to step into that hospitable Hendersonian home at any time. Look here, Phil, my opinion is not worth much, I'm aware. I'm rather of the vagabond order, I know. But you are right not to fall into a silk net yet : work, work, is the thing for us both. I am off to-morrow, to try to shift for myself at last.”

As he utters this virtuous resolve, he rises and holds out his hand, and Phil grasps it, opening his mouth in amazement the while.

“ You work ! ” he ejaculates.

“Yes, I’m going in for the hardest work I’ve ever done in my life. Shake hands, old boy, and say good-by to your mother and sisters for me.”

Phil Fletcher hears a pupil in the hall; he has no time to be astonished at his cousin’s determination. He says rapidly, as he is arranging his papers for the evening—

“I hope you put it smoothly to Mrs. Henderson: she may be a useful friend to the girls. I wish she’d give them the chance of a holiday there; but it’s as likely as not that we don’t hear of her for another half-century.”

“As likely as not,” Cousin Philip rejoins. Then he says good-by once more, rather brokenly, and goes and kisses his aunt and bids the girls farewell.

* * * * *

For all these arrangements a fresh impetus is given to the Halsworthy hilarities on

Wednesday night by the introduction of Mr. Philip Fletcher.

Mrs. Henderson takes him up to Moorbridge House herself, and specially presents him to the young presiding deity. “He’s his mother’s son, dear,—that’s the only claim he has on my regard,” she whispers to Madge; but she adds, as Madge is turning away—

“He’s as good as he’s good-looking, dear; I dare venture to tell you that. This holiday is the first he has had for years, and he half repents having taken it now. My own girls are darlings, but I do envy my old friend that son.”

“Yet he isn’t quite what I expected to see,” Madge says, a little wistfully: “he’s so handsome, and his goodness sits so easily upon him. His sisters must like him very much. And *how* good of you to get him! for I

have so many young girls to think of,
haven't I?"

This from the fair *châtelaine* of twenty.
Surely Philip Fletcher's lines are cast in
pleasant places!

CHAPTER II.

OLIVE AVELAND'S ERROR.

THE Thursday following Philip Fletcher's arrival is the best, brightest, most beautiful day of the Halsworthy week so far. The houses of all the clergy and gentry, for ten miles round, are filled with guests, and these, together with their entertainers, flock to the lawn of the head-centre of all this gaiety, Miss Roden herself.

Her friends from the Vicarage are with her very early, and Madge soon finds herself consulting Mr. Fletcher rather humbly about many things over which she had assumed the sole control before he came. For a man

whose whole grown-up life has been given to engrossing business (engrossing though distasteful), he is surprisingly well up in all that pertains to athletic sports, pastimes, amusements of every kind. "And he doesn't vaunt his familiarity with them at all—it just seems to slip out against his will," Madge tells Mrs. Henderson towards the end of the day, when Philip has carried off the stranger's honours in a flat-race.

Old Miss Roden, the great-aunt who takes care of Madge and manages (!) Moorbridge House (she really believes that she does both these things, thanks to Madge's tact and kind-heartedness), is out on the lawn in an arm-chair under the bright green sweeping branches of a deciduous cypress. All those visitors who are of sufficient note in the neighbourhood have been presented to the lady who is in authority over pleasant Madge

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Roden. To Madge's great delight, her aunt has invited a great number of people to finish the evening in Moorbridge House on this happy day.

"The young people can dance till twelve, and then we will have supper," she said, when she issued her invitations the day before to the happy many who have been chosen. And all this she has done of her own accord, and not at Madge's instigation.

Presently those who are to remain troop in joyfully, and every bed and dressing room in spacious Moorbridge House is soon full of merry young people intent on making the best of themselves. Only Madge lingers out on the lawn still, saying a few more words to her friends, the Hendersons, who are going home to dress.

"Don't rely on my coming back, Madge," Mrs. Henderson says. "I'm but a weak

mortal, and the temptation to stay at home and be cool and comfortable all the evening may overcome me."

"Fancy anyone abstaining from dancing!" Madge says pityingly, as they saunter slowly towards the entrance-gate. "I'm tired now: if I'd nothing to look forward to, my feet would ache horribly, and I should be asleep in two minutes; but, as it is, my feet are only throbbing to dance, and I do wonder at your thinking of coolness and comfort and home, when you have an opportunity of flying round double time to Olive Aveland's playing."

The four are walking abreast as Madge says this, and Mrs. Henderson answers,—

"You dear exhaustingly unfatigued person, you had better go in and dress now, or you'll be a laggard hostess—as bad a thing in a woman as it is for a man to be a laggard in love or war; isn't it, Philip?"

The vicar's wife turns kindly to include her old friend's son in the conversation ; and as her eyes fall on him, she exclaims, " Philip, you have overdone yourself to-day ;" for Philip Fletcher seems to be almost staggering as he walks.

" Yes," he says rather faintly, " this sudden burst after my sedentary life—it tries a fellow ; and you *were* right, Miss Roden : when that ball struck my foot, it gave me a harder blow than I confessed to."

" Oh ! " Madge cries, full of a feeling that is half pity for him, and half fear that this handsome young stranger may not be able to dance *all* the round dances with his lame foot. " Oh ! do come into the house, and have your things sent up ; do save yourself the walk : he must, mustn't he, Mrs. Henderson."

" It would be wise to do it," both the

Hendersons tell him; but his foot gets instantaneously better, and he insists on going back to the Vicarage; and Madge at last goes in to dress with a feeling that it will be a great blow to the beauty of this entertainment of theirs, if the flower of the manhood here assembled must be a wall-flower.

Madge is no laggard. In clouds of rose-coloured gauze that shade away to white nearly, she is springing down the stairs before any of the guest-chambers give forth their renovated occupants. All the walls of Moorbridge House are panelled with finely veined and polished wood, that was cut on the estate two centuries ago. It is all sombre and superb; but the bright young figure, that glances from room to room so swiftly, seems to make it all radiant at once.

Flowers droop in hanging baskets from

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every corner and every ceiling. Flowers on pedestals, in pyramids, on brackets, render every available corner gorgeous and fragrant. But not a bloom there is sweeter, brighter, or purer than the girl who owns them all—the frank-faced, light-hearted, pleasure-loving little heiress.

Suddenly there comes towards this Queen Rose of the rose-bud garden of girls a glorious contrast to her, in the form of as perfect an Amber Witch as the eyes of men have ever beheld. The two figures increase their speed as they approach one another. The rose-coloured gauze floats over the folds of an amber-hued silk; the round clear-complexioned cheek of bonnie Madge is pressed by the crimson lips and the ivory-white cheek of a tall, dark, lissom-figured girl, whose movements are supple and seductive as a serpent's.

"You dear Olive, to have come after all : isn't this all jolly !" Madge (who has not been trained down to be reticent on the subject of the charms of her own house) exclaims.

"It's all very delightful, Madge," the new comer says carelessly, "but you know that I think it a pity that all these people should be coming in to spoil it : I hate these gatherings !"

She says these last words with such an increase of force and emphasis as proves that she means them. She gives an impatient gesture, too, and sits down abruptly on a sofa, and twists a bracelet round her arm roughly.

"It's so *good* of you to have come, as you *do* hate it all so," Madge says ruefully : "no one plays as you do, and I should have been obliged to give up dancing myself and strum for them, if you hadn't been so kind ;

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but I shall feel so selfish if you don't seem to enjoy it at all."

Olive Aveland laughs a little contemptuously.

"Even you can't work a miracle, Madge ; but I'll tell you this for your comfort, dear. If I sit with my back to the congregation and my face to the piano all the evening, and you keep people from speaking to me, I shall be as happy here as I should have been in Mrs. Wilmot's school-room."

"I can't keep them from speaking to you ; and why should I, when everyone admires you so, and longs to be introduced to you——"

"Tell them that I'm Mrs. Wilmot's governess," Olive interrupts ; "say that there's something suspicious about the way I refuse to speak about my life before I came here ; say what you like, only save me from being beset by anyone."

She is unquestionably a handsome high-bred looking girl, this one who rises up now trembling a little from the effects of the vehemence with which she has spoken. A dark-haired handsome girl, with a pale face that tells falsehoods if its owner has not suffered a wealth of disappointment and sorrow in her time, however easily the world may be wagging with her now. There is a good deal of something that is not perhaps absolute defiance in her manner and expression. It is not absolute defiance. It is more a conviction that she will shortly be attacked, and an impatient readiness to defend herself. But people who are not given to drawing delicate distinctions between attributes which differ greatly, though on the surface they resemble one another slightly, fall into the error of fancying her largely endowed with the quality of defiance, and a rather

presuming person altogether for her position.

As she stands now, still playing with the bracelet that clasps her tender arm, with a half averted face, and a well-developed expression of "not wishing to be one of them," as Madge and old Miss Roden receive the friends who come trooping in, more than one glance falls upon her with pronounced, compelled admiration. She would ornament any room—any station—any age! For she has not only beauty, but style and cultivation.

And yet she is only "the governess" in Mrs. Wilmot's family, and Mrs. Wilmot is the wife of a quick-brained, purse-proud solicitor, who tells Olive every day that "she's handsome enough to pick and choose something better than a pauper parson." And yet she has not the option of "picking and choosing" as he declares, for with all her beauty and her

look of breed, men do not go down before her as the few who have seen Madge Roden already have gone down before that bright young person.

She is only the governess at Mrs. Wilmot's, and to-night she is here to play the piano without intermission while a score of girls who can't hold a candle to her whirl and frisk about in waltzes and gallops. It is a wayward fate hers. But wayward as it is, there is something in her face and bearing that hints even to a casual observer that she can battle with it. And wayward as it is, at this moment when we meet with her first, she would not change it for "any other that she can think of." This is the way she words her dissatisfied contentedness to herself as she superciliously surveys the society that comes joyously trooping into Madge Roden's drawing room.

By-and-by, after half a hundred jubilant ejaculations of satisfaction that mean nothing at all, Madge the rose-coloured and socially appointed Success, finds herself close to that Amber Witch whose witchcraft has never won her a good reward yet. And Madge says exultantly :

" You'll have to come out of your stronghold of indifference to everything directly, Olive ; Mrs. Henderson is going to bring a young man ! Imagine a young man at Moorbridge House."

" Brought men are never nice," Olive says, calmly twiddling her onyx bracelets ; " but anything that appears under Mrs. Henderson's auspices must be rather better than the rest of the world. What is she going to bring ?"

" You call him ' anything ' and ' what,' " Madge says rapidly ; " but when you see him you'll like him—I do."

Olive—the recipient of this annunciation—tries to laugh lightly—tries to seem to listen—tries to run her fingers over the keys carelessly, and fails in doing all these things, she is so miserably uninterested in the young man who is to appear under Mrs. Henderson's auspices.

The fact is that the poor girl, for all her defiant aspect and eighteen shilling a yard silk, is distraught by a pettifogging anxiety. What ought she to give to that glib, lissom maid of Madge's who pulled out the train of her amber silk for her, and adjusted one contumacious tress of silky dusky hair? And further, what a wretched cold she will catch, and how the night dews will ruin her dress if the Wilmots send the open square cart for her.

"What's he called?" she asks vaguely, in reference to that last remark of Madge's.

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And Madge says, as she sails away on a moderately good partner's arm,—

“ Oh ! didn't I tell you—Philip Fletcher ? ”

It would be evident to everyone in the room, if Miss Aveland's face was only turned roomwards, that something in the sound of that name strikes upon her strongly. But whether pleasantly or unpleasantly it is difficult to tell. However, her position at the piano saves her—mercifully saves her—from any scrutiny. And, as she goes on playing as cleverly as ever, her emotion passes unobserved.

There comes a lull presently. Girls who have partners wander into the room where refreshments await them. Girls who are without partners, but who are also hot and thirsty, try to look as if they had no tantalizing thoughts of the iced champagne and water their luckier compeers are drinking. At this juncture Olive, who has regained her

composure, turns round and looks steadily round the room.

Mrs. Henderson is just coming in. Kindly, clever, trustworthy Mrs. Henderson; the one matron in the district who has had the power of melting away a portion of Olive's reserve. She comes in alone, and Olive experiences a bitter sense of disappointment, very much to her own annoyance. Her first question, as Mrs. Henderson shakes hands with her, is :—

“Are you here alone?”

“Yes; unfortunately our visitor injured his ankle this morning; my husband is staying with him.”

“Madge Roden will be sorry, she expected a Mr. Philip Fletcher,” Olive says, venturing to pronounce the name that has the sweetest, saddest sound in the world to her.

“Yes, I must look for her and tell my bad

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news. I wish he had been here, even you would have admitted that he is a Triton among minnows.” Then, half laughing at herself the while, Mrs. Henderson goes on to say: “ You’ll soon find out that he is my weak point, Olive ; I loved him dearly for his mother’s sake, before I knew him, now I love him nearly as well as I do Madge ; my old friend has known tribulation enough, but she is recompensed for everything by the devotion of such a son as Phil.”

Olive, in the midst of a sudden, crushing revulsion of feeling, grasps this fact—namely, that she has made a mistake, and that the Philip Fletcher she has been half hoping, half fearing, to see is not the one who is staying at Mrs. Henderson’s. The Philip Fletcher who made life a howling wilderness for her for awhile had no living mother to have her heart stabbed by his conduct.

The girl, with unwonted pertinacity and very much to Mrs. Henderson's surprise, makes one further effort to clear up this point.

"I knew something of a Mr. Philip Fletcher once," she says; "the name struck me curiously just now; the one I mean had no regular profession, and very few friends he told us."

"That must have been his cousin—unluckily my Phil has a cousin who bears the same name; your description carries out what I have heard of him; he has no profession, and he does not deserve to have many friends; he is a clever worthless——"

"Don't abuse him," Olive exclaims angrily; "he is all you say, and worse perhaps, but don't abuse him."

And then Mrs. Henderson guesses how it has been with the girl who has been so

conspicuously reserved about her past life. Guesses how it has been, and pities her for such being, but at the same time feels a little annoyed at Olive's having confused the identity of the two cousins even in ignorance.

The dancing goes on merrily enough with the majority, but Madge Roden is unfeignedly, openly, heartily sorry, for the absence of the handsome stranger who is such a brilliant and attractive man of the world, in comparison with anyone who has hitherto been seen among these Exmoor hills. And old associations roused by the name overpower Olive to the extent of making her strike several wrong notes. His cousin must know something of the welfare and the whereabouts of that once well-loved black sheep. She will hear of him again. And “Oh!” she prays, “may it be something good at last.”

As she drives home this night in the Wilmot's square cart, she thinks of one drive she had on just such another night, five years ago, with Philip Fletcher opposite to her, and her hand clasped by his. Some of the words he whispered then, ring mockingly in her ears now, and she recalls with frightful fidelity, the exultant throb of bliss that her heart gave when he pleaded to "see her the next day to ask her to be—" the closer pressure of the hand said more to her than any spoken words could have said.

Of course she did not give him the permission, and of course he came, and saw, and wooed, and won her.

She was living with her uncle and aunt then, and they were rich people who surrounded their beautiful orphan niece with all imaginable luxury, and expected to be repaid for it, by her making a good marriage.

Then ensued a brief season of proud love and happiness, and faith in Philip Fletcher. A period of praying to her uncle and aunt to believe in him, to take his version of his life as gospel truth, to give her to him, and treat her as their own child still. And when her prayers were granted, and they were about to realize their wishes, then ensued a period of such anguish and humiliation as she shudders even now to think of. He proved false and a fool at the same time; he broke off his engagement to Olive Aveland, gambled for higher stakes, proposed to a richer girl, and was refused, for Olive's story was known.

She had been an ardent impulsive girl in those days, and had shown her love for her handsome adoring young lover very openly. So when she had the letter, in which he told her that he had “made a vow to crush the

love which could never make them happy, out of her heart—it had never existed in his own,” she thought it a hoax—a vile vulgar jest. But when he never came, when other tongues told the truth to her relations, she could not keep her miserable young heart up with that hope any longer. Whatever the cause the result was clear. He had jilted her—made her life a barren waste—been far more cruel than she had deemed it possible any one could ever be to her.

Pride, dignity, self-respect all fled, and in the madness of her misery she wrote to him. “You either loved me, or you lied to me,” she said; “if you don’t want me to curse the day I listened and believed, write to me once, and say at least you loved me then. You have made the world a hell to me—but I love you still.”

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He was a prudent young man. The richer girl had not refused him then, and he had no desire for any stray documents to fall into her hands. There was no knowing what a rash, ardent creature like Olive might do. So he burnt the letter and never answered it.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST AWAKENING.

It is the last day of the "Halsworthy week," and Madge Roden is permitting herself to feel rather glad that "it is nearly over," this fête which she has organised, and which, from everybody's point of view, has been such a grand success. Madge has enjoyed it as much as anyone; still she tells her aunt that she "thinks the quiet will be delightful again."

She says this as she stands in her aunt's dressing-room; she has come in to say "Good morning," previous to walking over to the Vicarage to breakfast, as is her frequent habit.

Old Miss Roden regrets that the quiet will not be so absolute as she could desire. “While the Hendersons have Mr. Fletcher staying there, we may be sure there will be something going on.”

“But, aunt, he’s just like one of our—of themselves,” Madge says hastily.

“Mrs. Henderson is quite infatuated about the young man,” Miss Roden the elder remarks, severely. “I quite look upon her as accountable for him in this neighbourhood ; she has introduced him.”

In her heart of hearts, Miss Roden is a little jealous of the more sympathetic married woman’s influence over Madge. “I respect Mrs. Henderson for her many good qualities,” Aunt Lucy says sometimes ; “but she is apt to rely too much on her own judgment.” This being her opinion of Mrs. Henderson, she is not altogether sorry when slight diffi-

culties, not to say little evils, may be fairly anticipated from the results of any of Mrs. Henderson's ill-considered acts.

Madge is not inclined to argue this morning ; she merely says,—

“I don't see that the neighbourhood has any business to question her regard for her old friend's son,” and then walks away to the Vicarage, thinking a good deal about the guest, and his sprained ankle, and his many delightful qualities. He is the first young man, it must be borne in mind, who has ever come intimately into Madge's life. And, unquestionably he is a very delightful first experience.

The drive through the Vicarage grounds curls and twists about in a sinuous and surprising way. Madge comes suddenly face to face with the man she is thinking about, and to her good-natured pleasure marks in a

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moment that he is not lame any longer. “ You will be able to come to us this last day, won’t you ? ” she asks very winningly, and the strain evidently pains him, for he limps as he answers,—

“ I hope so ; I am desperately inclined to be rash, if Mrs. Henderson will let me ; but at any rate you must tell me whom you expect to-day. I know all your names now, and I want you to tell me who I am to like and dislike when I meet them.”

“ This looks like his staying for some time,” Madge thinks, with a certain amount of pleasure in the thought, and so rather brightly she proceeds to mention several people, and give him brief incisive word-paintings of them.

“ I gather that they are more interesting as described by you, than they will be in real life,” he says. “ I should have known them

all so easily if I had come to your ball the other night ; that sprain was a miserable misfortune. The 'South Journal' says, 'all the rank, fashion, beauty, and grace of the neighbourhood assembled in Miss Roden's hospitable mansion, where dancing was kept up till a late hour.' Tell me about the beauties ! ”

“There were not many—only one real beauty,” Madge begins, truthfully. Then she generously reminds herself that the first description is the one that always influences the mind, and so she determines to say “true things” about the many girls who will be hoping for this man's notice while he is staying here.

“I ought to have said there are so many sweet, charming girls about here.”

“But only one regular beauty ; tell me about her. I don't care for sweet, charming girls.”

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“ She is a Miss Aveland.”

“ An intimate friend of yours ? Is there any chance of my seeing her at Moorbridge House ? ”

“ Every chance,” Madge answers, with what he considers most uncalled-for animation. “ She is a most intimate friend, though she hasn’t been here very long.” .

They are standing under the verandah outside the dining-room window now, and Mrs. Henderson from inside hears Madge’s last words, guesses to whom they relate, and comes up to join in the conversation.

“ You’re speaking of Olive, I suppose, Madge. By the way, Philip, she knew your cousin, she told me last night.” Mrs. Henderson puts her kind hand on her favourite’s shoulder as she says this, and her favourite smiles faintly.

“ I am constantly meeting with people who

have that pleasure, to my sorrow, for they have a habit of mixing up the two Philip Fletchers in other people's minds," he says.

Madge scans his face curiously, keenly ; then considerably averts her gaze as she suggests :

"I am sure the sun is too hot for you, Mr. Fletcher ; let us go in." And as they go in Mrs. Henderson words that belief of hers that the other Philip Fletcher has been rather too much to Miss Aveland, for her ever to make the mistake of "mixing him up" with the present Phil.

"Lucky fellow, if, as you say, she is such a beauty," he remarks. Then Mrs. Henderson tells him that his opportunities of judging of her beauty will be many : "for I'm as fond of her as Madge is, and I often get her here," she adds.

"I am afraid she won't show to-day ; the

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Wilmots would feel themselves defrauded of a portion of their pound of flesh if she wanted to come out two days following.”

“Are they the friends she is staying with ? ”

“She is governess in their family,” Mrs. Henderson explains, and again Madge observes that his face gets red and gets pale without any visible sufficient cause.

By the time the Queen of the Revels is due on the lawn, which is her throne, Mr. Philip Fletcher’s ankle is strong enough to enable him to walk home with her. Mrs. Henderson is a good, prudent woman, but she is no dragon of propriety, or prudery rather. She permits the young people to walk away alone. And by the time the sun sets this day Philip Fletcher has made up his mind that the stakes he came down to look at are worth playing for at any risk. Unluckily for him

he has to play against Time! As soon as he realizes this he resolves to get over the first meeting with Madge's beautiful favourite friend Miss Aveland, as soon as possible.

"It's the first holiday he has had for years, poor boy, and he does enjoy it so much," Mrs. Henderson says pathetically to Madge. And Madge's kind heart is at once stirred within her to make this holiday as pleasant an episode in his life of hard work and self-sacrifice as possible. With the close of the festive week, Halsworthy subsides into its normal condition of quiet, and by the dawning of the Monday of the next week, Philip has a very clear idea of what the ordinary Halsworthy life is.

"Her lines are cast in as secluded a spot as the Lady of Shalot's," he tells himself; "poor girl, with all that underlying vivacity she must be 'half sick of shadows.'"

He sketches boldly, cleverly, rapidly, and Madge knows all the best bits within a radius of ten miles. Her services are in constant requisition as this gifted amateur's guide. The guide is a very willing one, for the gifted amateur talks as cleverly as he sketches. They pass many long hours of these sunny summer days on the purple slopes of heath-covered hills of Exmoor, and Madge acknowledges to herself that she is getting more and more fascinated by this young fellow, who is as manly and clever as he is filial and good. Nevertheless, he is not the Philip she had pictured he would be, and sometimes a sense of disappointment seizes her. In short, long before Madge quite suffers her heart to stray into his keeping, it is broadly rumoured in Halsworthy that they are engaged.

Undoubtedly Philip Fletcher has a power

of staying as well as a turn of speed. In spite of its being so all-important to him, as he considers, to bring matters to a climax with this girl whom he means to make his wife, he does not mar or hinder himself by one hasty false step. To lookers-on he seems to be quietly walking over the course. But he is going with a caution that only he himself wots of.

He was rather tired of free expanses and bold sweeps of moorland, he says to her one day. He wants some close bit of perfect water and foliage. Of course Madge is equal to the occasion, and can supply his wants at the pleasant cost of a scramble for a couple of miles along the bank of a river that is always in fierce action against the boulders in its midst.

“It’s a series of waterfalls all the way up,” she explains, “but quite at the top where I

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mean, there is the sweetest, finest, grandest bit in the world.”

“Sweet, fine, and grand! that will do,” he says, as he takes up her shawl and his sketching materials, and indicates that he is ready to start.

“It’s all there, I assure you, Mr. Fletcher; the river bounds down the hill-side at that point over a dozen intersecting rocks; the suddenness and the velocity are grand. Then the banks are wreathed with flowers, and ivy and ferns all down to the water’s edge, that’s sweet. And the way the trees arch themselves and meet overhead gives one good ideas for a cathedral aisle, and that is fine, I am justified in my combination of epithets.”

They are well into the scrambling path by the river side now, and here and there steep places have to be clambered, for the path

(such as it is) is up rather a sharp incline. Nature seems to be making herself as fascinatingly beautiful as she possibly can, for the benefit of these two young people.

The advantage there is in a man being tall and strong is very patent to her as Philip swings her easily round some intervening boulders. In the heat of her perfect appreciation of this fact, she adventures upon a topic she had never touched upon before, and asks :

“ Are your sisters at all like you ? ”

“ I have no sisters,” he answers gaily, for Madge is looking particularly pretty, and he feels that his is going to be a very fair fate after all.

In her astonishment at this his utter renunciation of his nearest kin, Madge suffers her feet to slip from under her, and becomes immersed in about two feet of water. By the

time she is pulled out, and her dress has been deftly wrung, Philip is ready with an explanation of that apparently incomprehensible speech.

“ How could I remember the existence of my sisters or of any other human being, when my mind was so full of——” He pauses, for his tact teaches him that to finish his sentence as he had intended doing when he commenced it, will be to ruin his cause altogether. Madge thoroughly appreciates that pause. It saves her the responsibility of being definite, and she feels rather more indefinite at this moment than she has ever felt in her life before. Philip Fletcher is handsome, well-bred, and cleverly amusing. But so she had pre-determined he would be, before she ever saw him. And she had also pre-determined that he would be something more—which he is not.

So Madge collects her faculties, and recollects the original topic which led to that vague remark of his.

"Now that your mind is no longer full of something it oughtn't to have been full of at all," she says, a little slyly, "I suppose you can answer my question, are your sisters at all like you?"

"No-o," he answers a little hesitatingly. Chrissy and Mabel Fletcher are not at all the type of women Philip admires. But his hesitation in this matter of considering their claims to a resemblance of him, is not due to vanity, but to vexation of spirit of which Madge has no conception. No human being is altogether bad, and at this juncture the Philip Fletcher who is winning Madge Roden to the best of his ability, feels heartily ashamed of himself—and horribly afraid of either "going on," or "going back." So it is

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that he hesitates and blanches a little as he answers,

" No—they're not like me—happily for them."

There is a ring of something genuine about this speech—about the tone of it—about the look which accompanies it ! And Madge is so sympathetic to anything that is genuine. She puzzles herself for a brief moment, as to whether it is self-contempt or self-compassion, this " something " which thrills her. That moment over—though she is puzzled still—she gives the rein to her sympathy and speaks :

" You mean them to be thought something very splendid indeed, when you say ' happily for them ' they're not like you. How I'd like to know your sisters."

In spite of this abject flattery Madge is not a fawning flirt. Be it understood at once

that her apparent desire to win and chain this man by all the subtle influences in her power, is only the result of her position and her passion for making her fellow-creatures think well of her. As the mistress of Moorbridge House she has been brought forward very prominently in her limited social circle. But he misjudges her a little, and believes that she is quite ready to pick up the handkerchief the instant it is his sovereign will to throw it. Believing this he begins to undervalue her a little, and to ask himself: "After all, is that love worth having which has been won so easily?" For clever as he is, Mr. Philip Fletcher has fallen into the manly error of mistaking Madge's admiration for the Idea he represents to her for love of himself.

The sketching materials have been put up for a long time, and the sun is going down

with golden reluctance, and the thrill of the falling waters sounds more loudly than it does in broad day, before Philip Fletcher and Madge Roden make the homeward move this night. By the time they do this they have advanced greatly in their intimacy—though he knows and she feels that he checked himself on the brink of an offer of marriage to her just now. Notwithstanding that apparently precautionary halt of his, he is doing good work with Madge this day. For he talks to her of the many ambitions of his boyhood, and she remembers how he renounced them all for the benefit of his family.

‘Sauntering along in that soft summer night air by the side of the intemperate river, it occurs to her that all these long sunny hours spent together, “are not to be justified” if she halts and wavers now. Madge is as

honest as the day, and as honourable as a man, or rather as the perfect type of man, ought to be. She holds it to be as faulty a proceeding for a woman to raise false hopes, and then to screen herself behind innocence and unconsciousness, as it is for a man to do so. She had not meant to give him excellent opportunities of learning to love her, but it came home to her this evening that she had seemed to do it. And the seeming must have misled him to the full as much as if she had meant it. "And I wouldn't deceive a dog knowingly," the girl is thinking, self-condemningly, while the object of her compassion and remorse walks on in unusual silence by her side.

He is quite clever enough to follow the workings of her mind. Hers is a sensitive tell-tale face, that says "sorry or glad" as openly as a child's. He is right in so far as

he thinks that Madge's eyes are opened to-night to the fact that he has passed the narrow boundary line between friendship and love. But he is wrong in the deduction he draws, namely, that Madge will adopt a stand-off demeanour to him until she has quite made up her mind as to whether it would be well for her to repel or to accept him. Madge never in her life made a plan or chalked out a line of conduct that, if followed out, would be of benefit to herself alone. She is not likely to do it now. Unluckily for herself, she is as generous, as undesigning, and unsuspicious in this as in other matters. Madge would go on being just as friendly, just as frank, just as demonstrative of her regard for him as she had ever been, whether he proposed to her or not, and whether she refused him or not. That is, she will be these things if he will let her. But the chill fear that this well-liked new

acquaintance, who seems much more like an old friend to her than any one else in the world, will misjudge her, has not struck her.

So he thinks she is leading him on after the manner of the majority, when she exclaims——

CHAPTER IV.

GENEROUS FOLLY.

"Thus doth the dust destroy the diamond."

"Look here! I used to play at coming to this cottage to spend my honeymoon, when I was a child;" and she points as she speaks to a low thatched house that stands a little way back from the river, on a half-moon of turf that is studded with myrtles just bursting into bloom, and with standard roses.

"With whom used you to play that interesting game?" he asks with the slightest accent of sarcasm in his voice. He is not in the least in love with this girl, who is childish enough to be surprised at a man feeling (or feigning) love for her. But he is jealous, for

all that, at her ever having played at love and matrimony before his advent.

“Why with my doll, to be sure,” she answers, feeling half ashamed at having been led into speaking of her baby-pursuits. “I’d no brothers nor sisters, you know,” she adds, apologetically; “and one *must* play with something. Old servants of ours live here, and let lodgings; so we can sit down and rest on this bench.”

As she speaks, she stoops and walks in under the drooping branches of a tree that partially conceals a nobbly, gnarled, uncomfortable combination of roots and branches that is supposed to look essentially rustic; and he follows her, and asks,—

“No brothers nor sisters!—any cousins?”

“Oh yes! I have cousins; but they live in London, and we never met as children.”

“And no playfellows—no little lovers to

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bring ‘a lily or a cherry, or some new-invented game,’ as Haynes Baily sings.” Again there is the slight, faint accent of jealous sarcasm in his tone ; and this time Madge hears it, and knows what it means, and feels that in some way or other she has been wrong again.

There is a good deal of ease, and force, and freedom about a statement this semi-conviction impels her to make by-and-by. She has been very much accustomed all her life to make full confession of every fault and folly she is self-suspected of ; and she is also very much accustomed to receive instant and loving forgiveness. She is craving for this man’s pardon now—his pardon for a fault she has not committed ; and so presently she says, so truthfully and timidly (and he merely thinks her an audacious flirt for her pains),—

“I have never had a lover in my life, Mr. Fletcher; not even a baby one to bring me ‘a lily or a cherry.’”

There is a rickety table in front of the nobbly and gnarled seat, and on this Philip Fletcher leans his arms as he turns his head to look at the girl by his side; and her colour rises fast and furiously, for his glance is a far bolder one than the Philip of her imaginings would have bestowed upon her.

“Oh! I see,” he says, “it’s your habit, Miss Roden, to ignore all the love that is offered to you. Well! it’s a course that must save *you* a great deal of trouble; but how about the offerers’?”

“Through her own act her majesty he wounds:” she with her own hand gave him the nettle (it isn’t a dagger, or anything true and tried, like steel) with which he is stinging her now. Why did she say anything about

that childish pastime of hers? Why did he lure her into this conversational web by means of Haynes Baily's innocent little song?

“ Ah!” she says quickly, really stung into imprudence now, “you shouldn't say that. If any offerings had been made, do you think I would ever speak of them to *you*—to anyone?”

He is trying to make up his mind as to whether or not it would be well to take the leap now, at once; or whether it would be well to wait, and make her feel and fear that her prey may escape her altogether. He misconstrues her utterly and entirely. He believes that she is giving him encouragement, and that it is quite on the cards that she may only be desirous of adding his scalp to her collection. For he has no faith in that statement of hers that she has never had a lover; and as he hesitates and pauses,

Madge rises and picks up the light shawl which she has thrown on the table, and in doing so pulls to the ground a pair of scissors that have been lying there unobserved.

“Mrs. Ball must have lodgers,” she remarks, as she picks up the gilt-handled scissors; “these can’t be hers. I’ll go and hear who it is.”

And before Philip Fletcher has made up his mind as to whether it would be well to put it to the touch quite so soon or not, Madge has crossed the myrtle-studded lawn, and is knocking at the door of the cottage.

In another instant a pleasant buzz falls on his ears. Madge’s rich clear voice is raised in gratified surprise, and some fuller, deeper notes that are not unfamiliar—that are, “Yes, by Jove! that *are* Olive’s,” he cries, as against his own sense of expediency he rises, and goes half across the lawn, and there waits

to be called for, to be seen, to be—he hardly dares to think what.

Meantime the pleasant buzz has ceased, and there is a sort of low hum of explanation going on inside the pretty cottage, the outside of which is all beauty, and peace, and flowers. There is a goodly share of beauty inside also ; but there is no peace in one breast at least, and the flowers are changing to noxious weeds rapidly.

Madge, having crossed the threshold, has been met, stopped, petrified nearly, by the apparition of a tall lissom figure in unbleached holland. (In the midst of her astonishment, Madge notices the admirable manner in which the polonaise deports itself, and resolves to have the pattern of it.) There is nothing at all melodramatic about the utterance of the tall lissom figure ; she merely says,—

"When did *this* Mr. Fletcher come, dear?"

"Why, some time ago," Madge answers; "don't you know? Of course you don't, though; you know nothing of what goes on in Halsworthy, when Halsworthy shakes off dull sloth. But are you *here*?" and why are you here, and how are you here?"

"I have had neuralgia, and I've come here for a holiday and a change," Olive Aveland says, rather deprecatingly; and Madge protests—

"A change! coming into the bed of a river for neuralgia; why didn't you come to me? You shall come to-night."

"I cannot."

She emphasizes her refusal very firmly; but Madge can be equally decided, equally firm. In the bottom of this latter's heart, there lurks a happy thought that it will be well to have Olive Aveland with them for the

remainder of the homeward walk. “Perhaps he may fall in love with Olive,” Madge thinks ; “and if he does, I wonder if I should like it.”

“Do go on, dear,” Olive says, “and leave me quiet ; the least thing drives me half mad with pain now : do go on to-night.”

“That’s because you need change and excitement,” Madge says, sapiently. Then she proceeds to introduce strong elements of both these things into Olive’s life by going to the door and calling for “Mr. Fletcher.”


He comes in at once, without delay, without embarrassment, apparently. There’ is nothing else for him to do—and (off the boards) he is a capital actor.

He comes in with that first coating of expression on his face, which can take the colour from any other person’s look. Whatever Olive Aveland may do, however she may

look or speak, she will not be able to surprise him into awkwardness, hesitation, or sorrow. He will follow easily, however tortuous the path she may take. She takes a straight one ; and still, odd as it may seem, he follows her.

He is one of the easiest-going men on the face of the earth. Literally, he never "troubles" himself about anything. This venture that he is making now is the most arduous work of his life ; and already he begins to repent himself of making it, because of the labour it involves.

After all he begins to question, "What is the worth of it all ?" If all goes smoothly, and he marries this fresh young girl and her two thousand a year, will the "second place" he will take satisfy him ? He will be accepted with reservations by her friends, he knows, and he will be mentally right in hating them for



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being morally right, and there is nothing for him to do now but to go on.

He arrives at this conclusion as Olive Aveland comes into the passage, well into the light that is shed through the doorway, and says,—

“ A friend of yours, Madge, I suppose ? I am glad to see him.”

“ There will be no difficulty with a woman who can say this, to spare another woman’s feelings.” At least, Philip is sure of this for a moment. Then he wonders “ what she means,” as Olive’s eyes show him that she is glad, very glad, to see him.

She is splendidly handsome ! Of this, at any rate, there is no doubt, as she goes back with a swing into the low-roofed, lattice-windowed room, and bids them follow her. Come what will of this *rencontre*, Olive is resolved to play the hostess to-night to Philip Fletcher.

"You benighted wanderers must stay and have supper with me," she says, moving rapidly about, and directing Mrs. Ball to bring in everything eatable and drinkable that the house contains, or that can be procured at this unhallowed hour. And so presently the feast is spread, and rather well spread too; for Olive's services are valuable to Mrs. Wilmot, and that lady seeks to regain them speedily by a supply of well-stocked baskets.

They have been talking scenery vigorously ever since Philip came in. His sketch has been shown, and Olive has looked at it with eyes that see nothing, but that glisten strangely. As she gives it back to him, his hand touches hers, his eyes fasten on and hold hers, and she shivers in a way that betokens that she is feeling either joy or pain.

"Olive dear, you're cold," Madge says,

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“and it’s time I were at home ; we don’t deserve supper at your hands,—do we, Mr. Fletcher?”

She appeals to him in the lightest way. She means absolutely nothing more than this, that as Olive is cold and chilled, it is a pity to keep her up. But there is a deeper meaning, Olive feels, in the way in which Philip Fletcher responds,

“I don’t deserve anything at Miss Aveland’s hands. That is the only thing I feel sure of.”

“And that feeling is the result of Mrs. Ball being rather slow in her movements, and many other things being out of joint.” Olive speaks with a carelessness which she is very far from feeling. But Philip’s speech has this effect upon her : she feels very strong, and very merciful !

By-and-by (this water-side cottage is

close to Halsworthy), Mrs. Henderson walks down, having "felt certain that she should find them there," she says ; and they all sit down, and eat and drink things that are pleasant, and avoid things that are unpleasant, at Olive's little oval table. Would that the same could be said of every gathering for friendly and festive purposes !

At length a remembrance of old Miss Roden arises, and Madge pronounces the decree that they must part, as she must go home, and assuage any anxiety that Aunt Lucy may think proper to feel. And so they all saunter out together into the cool quiet night air, Olive going with them.

As they pass slowly over the turf under the moonlight, Miss Aveland is divided from Philip by Madge and Mrs. Henderson. But he alters this arrangement presently, by crossing over to gather a great shiny, starry

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branch of jessamine that hangs temptingly over the garden hedge. This brings him by Olive's side, and as he calls her attention to the immense size of the jessamine flowers, unseen by the others his hand clasps hers.

Clasps it in a way that nearly makes her cry out with the pain of this joy that may be as treacherous as all the joys she has ever felt through him have proved themselves.

Whatever he may have been, false, feeble, cowardly, at any rate she has the bliss of feeling that at the present moment he is not indifferent. His hand trembles to the full as much as hers does, and his face is full of earnest desire to make her look at him in a way that shall be intelligible to him. But, though she lets her hand rest in his for a moment, she will not let him wring the

whole truth from the eyes that have grown deeper through long weeping for him.

"It's still quite early," Madge says. "It would only be sensible of Olive to come in with us, and tell Aunt Lucy that it's her Arcadian freak that has made us so late as this even." And though she faintly negatives the proposition at first, she presently assents ; for it is passing sweet to her, this sight of him.

Beautiful Moorbridge House rises before them directly, standing out clearly from its background of foliage-covered hill-side. The lawn has recovered from the effects of the Halsworthy week, and presents its usual emerald green and velvety appearance. Rich odours from flower-beds and open conservatory windows are wafted towards them. All looks and feels smooth, prosperous, safe. It will be "a position that none but a fool would resign, that of being the

master of this place," Philip Fletcher thinks as he strolls with face bent down towards Olive Aveland.

Aunt Lucy comes to the open French window of the drawing-room conservatory (a modern addition), and they assuage the anxiety and appease the wrath of the dear old lady, who is never by any chance either wrathful or anxious. They are very loth to part, although it seems as if they had nothing left to say to one another, for they sit out on the garden chairs for another hour at least, almost in silence.

Madge is tired, puzzled, uncertain of her own wishes. Mrs. Henderson is puzzled too, but very certain of her own wishes. Olive is in one of those tempests of memory, when one thought after another comes upon one like alternate peals of deafening thunder and dazzling lightning. She cannot but re-

member how passionately this man by her side wooed her long ago. She cannot but remember how soon after that passionate wooing he told her he had never loved her. Thoughts of the misery and madness, of the shame, and the fury, and the agony of love thrown back in her face, are upon her now. What wonder that she does not speak? What wonder that she marvels whether all this is a dream within a dream as she recalls that fervent, trembling clasp his hand gave hers; only one little hour ago by the river side.

Mrs. Henderson breaks the spell by saying,—

“Phil, I had a note from your sister Mabel to-day: she is anxious about Chrissy.”

“About Chrissy?” he stammers.

“Yes; haven’t they told you? She has an attack of that wearing intermittent fever and

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ague. Mabel, in her anxiety, forgets to mention you ; but she speaks of that ne’er-do-well cousin of yours.”

There is a long pause after this. Then Philip dares all, knowing that Olive’s eyes are on him.

“What of him, Mrs. Henderson ?”

“She says, ‘my dear mother is miserable about our cousin Philip ; we have heard nothing of him for weeks, and in spite of all his faults we are very fond of him.’”

“Poor affectionate Mabel,” Philip says ; and there is a huskiness in his voice that makes both Mrs. Henderson and Madge feel very tender to him.

“I believe you are fond of the ne’er-do-well yourself,” Madge says cordially ; and he can’t answer her, for Olive’s eyes are on him still.

It is settled at last, how or why no one can

say, that Mrs. Henderson shall walk home with one of Madge's servants, and Philip Fletcher escorts Miss Aveland back to her lodgings. As soon as they clear off Madge's grounds, Olive stops short and exclaims,—

“Why are you masquerading here? What object have you in deceiving that good woman and that poor girl who may be miserable enough to love you? *Why* are you passing yourself off as your cousin?”

Almost simultaneously Mrs. Henderson is saying,—

“Madge! you have something to tell me? Is it what I hope?”

CHAPTER V.

“THE LITTLE PITTED SPECK ON GARNERED
FRUIT.”

HE does not attempt to answer Olive Aveland in words. He just possesses himself of her hands, and bends his face down on them ; and as he does this, a great choking breath, that is more than half sigh, bursts from him full of all manner of feeling. And so in the old days has he often sighed his soul out, by way of stopping any awkward inquiries ; and so in the old days, before he discovered his love for her, had he been wont to kiss her hands. And she remembers all these things and still can only say—



"Oh, Philip ! oh, Philip, Philip !"

Of course stern standers-up for the dignity of the female sex will say that she ought, if not exactly to hate him (Christian charity forbids that), to crush him by unaffected contempt and indifference. When a man has once trifled with and wounded a woman's heart, that heart is, we all know, in duty (to its owner) bound to be like ice to him henceforth. But, unfortunately, the heart is an organ that will not always perform its high and proper duties, especially if these latter be repugnant to it.

It is idiotic of her to stand there and suffer him to treat her hands affectionately, when he had treated her heart so badly. But women are apt to be idiotic in these matters,—apt to forget the offence in the presence of the offender.

She wrings herself away from him pre-

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sently, and says angrily, for she feels that he is only fooling her again,—

“ You can’t answer my question—I see you can’t. Until to-night I thought that, odd as it seemed to me, they must know you were *you* ; but that speech of Mrs. Henderson’s to-night about the ne’er-do-well !— oh, Philip ! ”

She breaks down panting to subdue her inclination to cry, and he feels that he must speak or have a scene.

“ It’s not the most honourable position in the world that I’m occupying now,” he says bitterly. “ No one knows that better than myself ; but, after all, my masquerading, as you call it, will do no harm to anyone. Some time or other, when I have won her liking thoroughly, I shall tell Mrs. Henderson that I’m not that admirable Crichton, my cousin ; and then, if she continues to honour me with

her regard, though she knows I'm not the son of her old friend, it will prove to *you* that I'm not so utterly worthless.”

“As if it mattered what I thought,” she says hotly, walking on with steps that are unsteady towards the river-side cottage. “And as for doing ‘no harm’ to anyone—what are you doing to Miss Roden? She *shall* not learn to love you,” she continues in a whirlwind of different feelings. “I won't stand by quietly, and see dear Madge walk into a net of your weaving.”

He sees that she is jealous, and he is sure of her loving him still as he ever was. This being the case, he has no fear of what she may do.

The brisk night air clears his mind, and cools the warm tumultuous feelings which the sight of this girl has engendered in his heart again. His heart! yes, actually his heart.

For, in spite of that crushing letter of years ago, Olive Aveland sways him, thrills him, fires him as no other woman has ever done. In short, in spite of his selfish policy, pursued because he fancies he "can't strike out a decent career," because he believes that he never will be anything but a ne'er-do-well, he loves her, and would at this moment sacrifice any human being (but himself) to kiss her lips and feel that he might do it.

But he checks the impulse to cast himself on the hot loving heart that, outraged as it is, is still so true to him. He lifts his hat off a brow that is so much wider and braver than it need be, considering the quality of that which is beneath it, and—he is prudent.

"You are as harsh to me as the rest of the world, Olive."

"Oh, Heaven help me to be so!" she cries sharply.

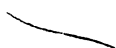
“You distrust me as everyone else does. How can a man do right who is universally distrusted? It will not be through the help of any of my fellow-creatures if I ever do walk a decently straight course, for they have done all they can to make my way devious.” He winds up with a reckless, scornful laugh. “Olive!” he bends down and looks earnestly into her face, “let me have a chance of making friends with these people. It will be like the warning note of ‘the leper,’ if you tell them that I am that outcast cousin of the Fletchers, whom the Hendersons have been taught to consider a social miscreant.”

“I shall be only one degree less horribly wrong than yourself.” Then a shock of revulsion of feeling overcomes her, and she whimpers, “Philip! do, *do* tell me what brought you here; will you, Philip?”

Her voice is very pathetic, very full of some belief in him that he can't quite understand for a moment or two. Then, at the expiration of that moment or two, some evil spirit clears his vision, and he knows that poor Olive Aveland believes that he has come here to be near her again.

He deadens his conscience, he resolutely closes his heart to the appeal made to it by that girl's trusting faith and clinging love, and resolves to use her belief as a weapon in his own service. And it is not altogether easy, nor is it altogether difficult, for him to do this ; for he loves this girl who stands trembling by his side—trembling with a truer, deeper love for him than he will ever inspire in another woman's heart.

“Darling !” he says in a desperate kind of whisper, as if the truth were being wrung from him against his will, “does not your



heart tell you why I came here—where you were?"

The last words are in such a sunken, pleading voice, that it carries conviction with it to the heart and mind of that girl, who would—what would she not give to be loved once more by this man, who once made her the by-word that, in spite of our sense of justice, jilted girls are?

She does not actually say, "Did you come to *me*, Philip?" but she looks with those glorious velvet eyes of hers, that are so unspeakably soft and seductive, and once more he lowers his head down close, very close, to her own as he calls her—

"My darling! always my darling!"

She is in a fool's paradise for a few moments more, while the echo of that loving whisper still lingers in her ear; then she finds that she is at the water-side cottage-

gate, and that she must say "good-night" to this man, who is her lover and still not her lover. She feels as if the ground were slipping from under her feet—as if he might vanish, and she never see him more, even as he holds her hand in his and bids her a "good-by" so full of gentleness and consideration that it seems to have a promise in it.

"Shall I see—when shall I see you again?" she ventures to say. "You know I am here alone, and so you mustn't call here; but in a day or two, if you like, I shall be back at Mrs. Wilmot's, and I can always see my friends there!"

She marks his brow lower in the middle of her sentence, and so there is an anxious ring in her voice towards the end of it.

"For your sake, I don't think it would be well for me to call there yet, darling,"

he replies softly, "just at present you see——."

And she interrupts him to say,

"Oh, Philip ; *as* you like—*when* you like, only don't tell me that this is good-bye after all these years."

And then she goes in beaten down and humiliated in a measure, by her knowledge of the utter abnegation of anything like an attempt at dignity of which she has been guilty

Her head is in a whirl, and her heart is thumping, but the action of both is checked abruptly by a certain sullen look of disapprobation that sits upon the countenance of her landlady, when the door is opened. Olive understands it in an instant. The strict sense of propriety which animates the matronly British bosom, is outraged by these late walks abroad.

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"I have been up to Moorbridge House with Miss Roden," she begins, faltering. But the landlady interrupts the sentence with vicious civility,

"I daresay you have, Miss; and I shouldn't have waited up long after my usual time, if it wasn't that I wanted to tell you to-night—thinking that there might be inconvenience in your leaving it in the morning—that the rooms are engaged *from* to-morrow, Miss; and the party coming in at once."

A great flush of colour burns all over Olive's face. She feels that this woman dares to deem her (Olive) guilty of something like impropriety or carelessness of conduct—dares to try and show her that she has been wrong in some way or other. And she has no home to go to; no place but Mrs. Wilmot's house, and Mrs. Wilmot

will question, why she "left her lodgings, when she was really getting stronger so quickly." All these considerations force themselves upon her mind at once, and she is overwrought by that unexpected sight of the old love which has been given her to-night, and she is only a woman, and so she cries.

But only for a moment, though. Olive Aveland is not of the order that attempts to wash away disagreeables in a flood of tears. She dries her eyes with a speed that perplexes her landlady, who has gone to get a bedroom candlestick, and who finds her young lodger quite herself again, on her return to the passage.

"I'll pay you to-night—I shall leave directly after breakfast," Olive says; "I suppose you can get a boy to take my boxes."

"Where to?" the landlady asks, reflec-

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tively. And a direct inspiration leads Olive to answer,

“To Moorbridge House.”

The immediate effect of this direct inspiration is to make the landlady feel that, “Well, if ever there was a serpent it is this young person at Mrs. Wilmot’s; to dare and go to the shelter of Miss Madge’s roof, when she had been walking with Miss Madge’s young man!”

However, Miss Aveland’s manner is conclusive, and so the mistress of the water-side cottage does not make any open appeal or protest. But she goes to bed thinking, “that if ever *there was* a serpent, this one was, and Miss Madge did ought to know.”

It is the

—“little pitted speck in garner’d fruit,
That, rotting inwards, slowly moulders all.”

Poor Olive Aveland was not very carefully

"garnered" in these days by anyone. But the "little pitted speck" was upon her already in that landlady's eyes.

This is not the first time that Olive Aveland has been tried, judged, found guilty, and condemned unfairly. Years ago, when Philip Fletcher jilted her (it is as well to use the expression concerning her that was always used, even by her dearest friends, *behind her back* in those desolate days). Years ago, when Philip Fletcher jilted her, her little world—the circle of friends and acquaintances in which was comprised "everybody" to her young mind, had been disturbed by the broken alliance.

"—The world is a nettle—disturb it, it stings ;
Grasp it firmly, it stings not. On one of two things,
If you would not be stung, it behoves you to settle—
Avoid it, or crush it. She crushed not the nettle,
For she could not, nor would she avoid it ; she tried,
With the weak hand of woman, to thrust it aside,
And it stung her ! A woman is too slight a thing
To trample the world without feeling its sting."


These lines adapted themselves to her poor, common case with bitter force and accuracy. The world would not be tolerant to the reserve she had displayed about those broken vows which had blighted her life. It whispered about her, and surmised about her, and undermined all her bravery and self-reliance and common sense.

So, in an evil hour she had writhed round, and "tried, with the weaker hand of woman, to thrust" aside the nettles of social slight and contumely that the very people who blamed Philip Fletcher so severely showered upon her. She evaded questions that only cut her, and could never cure her pain. She grew silent, "sulky and contumacious, and conscience-stricken," they called it each of these things in turn, when they had wanted her to analyse for their amusement, each phase of this life-agony of hers—each act of

this heart-murder that Philip had committed. And so at last she had been so tortured, poor thing, in various minor ways, that might seem very small and insignificant if written down here, that she had mistaken the solicitude of her uncle for severity, and had gone out from the scenes of the life and death of her love, into what seemed a wilderness.

And now, after the long, hard battle with incongruous associations, and uncongenial surroundings, and her own insubordinate spirit, she has met that wrecker again, and is ready as ever to be wrecked.

“He will come back to her,” she tries to tell herself—tries to feel that she believes, as she next morning recalls every act, and word, and look of love and devotion that he had vouchsafed to her the previous night. They were not many, when counted up even with the care with which a woman who is madly, foolishly,



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hopelessly in love does count up such things. They were not many. A few of those impassioned looks that practice had made him so perfect in. A few lingering hand-clasps, that might have been (how her face burns, flames, fires at the doubt) as much her fault as his. A few melodious “darlings!” that were—ah! well! sweeter than any sound in the world to her, for all their doubtful value.

She has a very brave, honest, honourable trust in Madge Roden, and in Madge Roden’s sincerity and constancy, and general womanliness and worth. Yet for all this perfect trust poor Olive feels very dubious and diffident, as she comes into her friend’s presence the next day after that moonlight walk.

Madge is in the middle of the instalment for that month of an absorbing serial story

in which "all the people are just as commonplace as she is herself," she feels with a certain sense of gratitude to the author for not having made his puppets too exalted for her to sympathise with them. She has "had it out" with Mrs. Henderson about that absorbing young guest at the Vicarage, who is concentrating all the attention "of everybody" (she means of herself and Mrs. Henderson) upon herself at present. And she is trying to feel a weight of responsibility pressing upon her shoulders, concerning the forthcoming Harvest Festival, and generally endeavouring to feel that "uneasy lies the head that wears a crown."

And failing, failing altogether she knows, for she is too bright, as well as too true, to humbug even herself successfully.

To her enters Olive, at a great disadvantage to-day, by reason of the untoward

events of last evening. At a further disadvantage—shall not the whole truth be told concerning these very *human* beings?—by reason of all the starch having come out of her brown holland polonaise. We are all dependent on these trifles. No girl can be at her best when her dress is limp in a way that it was not designed to be.

“Oh, Madge,” she begins, rather hurriedly and confusedly ; “what will you think when I tell you I have come to claim your hospitality—will you take me in?”

Madge has bounded to her feet at the first word of Olive’s intention ; she is ready with her welcome as if she had been preparing it for a week.

“I *am* glad—I *am* glad you dear, to have come to me after all ; you shall have the biggest room with the sweetest view opening into mine. I mean the room

opens into mine, not the view, you know—and we'll sit up chatting all night.”

Madge has had, very few enthusiastic friends in her brief life. To her there is an immense amount of unhallowed bliss in the prospect of sitting up chatting (she doesn't know or care about what) half the night.

“The fact is, dear,” Miss Aveland prevaricates, love and conscience making a thorough coward of her,—“Mrs. Bale had an opportunity of letting her lodgings, so I thought, as you had asked me——”

“Oh! bless Mrs. Bale!” Madge interrupts, glittering all over with the delight of having this selected friend of hers domesticated with her in her own house; “it's better than the whole Halsworthy week put together to have you here.”

“It's better than the whole Halsworthy week put together to be here, I know that,”

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Olive says devoutly, as she remembers how intimate Mrs. Henderson (his guardian angel) and Madge are, and speculates upon the increased probabilities of seeing him.

"I am going to lunch with Mrs. Henderson," Madge says presently, "and now you must come too, and we're going to fish up the valley after luncheon ; won't it be jolly ! you and I together fishing."

"Is she fond of fishing ? I thought she didn't care for anything of that sort," Olive says hypocritically, in her desire to be assured as to whom the " we " referred to are.

And Madge's answer is given without hesitation.

"No. Mrs. Henderson doesn't care a bit about fishing, but she is going with Mr. Fletcher and me to-day, because I begged for her company so hard, she couldn't refuse me."

"You don't like being alone with him, then," Olive cries, in her unwitting jealousy. She would have every woman sigh for him in fact, while he should sigh for none but her. Poor deluded Olive!

"I think even in Halsworthy one ought to be careful," Madge says, majestically, strengthening herself to utter the saying by the thought that it is a fierce light that beats upon her. "One can't be too careful," she repeats with an emphasis of which she does not herself know the full meaning—an emphasis Olive, who begins to fear that she may not have been careful enough in the matter of meandering about last night with Philip Fletcher, winces under.

"Well, Madge," she says, with a smile that tries hard to be scornful, and that only succeeds in being very, very sorrowful, "the lion is lying down with the lamb with a

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vengeance, when you and prudent considerations are allied.”

And Madge, utterly oblivious both of the scorn and the sorrow, says truly enough, as she shakes her dear, glossy head,—

“They don’t fetter either of us very much, I fancy, and why should they, when we never wish to do anything imprudent. Olive, if you wear buff to-day, I’ll wear blue—then we shan’t clash.”

As if the colour of their dresses was the only matter in which those two girls could clash! Those two girls whom Philip Fletcher was moving about the board very much as he willed.

So again it was an Amber Witch who contrasted with bright Madge (Madge has blue this time). An oval-faced Amber Witch with velvet eyes of the deepest hue, and with a supple, lissom figure, the grace of

which would lead the eye off the face of a Venus.

Seeing her come in by gracious, open-hearted Madge's side to luncheon at Mrs. Henderson's, previous to starting on the fishing excursion, Philip calls himself "a blackguard," and calls himself so heartily.

CHAPTER VI.

FISHING !

“ Let Fate do her worst, there are relics of joy,
Bright gleams of the past, which she cannot destroy.”

“ As I don't care to vex my soul with a line and a fly (what fools the fishes must be to believe in anything so palpably artificial),” she interpolates contemptuously, pointing to a coachman, and “ blue-upright,” which Philip had provided with much care and forethought, “ I must take something to read.”

Mrs. Henderson is the speaker, and her appeal is made to Madge. Madge being in a hurry to get off, puts her hand down on the first book she sees.

“ *The Cornhill* ! Mrs. Henderson is reading it, I know,” Philip apologises. “ The Small House at Allington ” is the serial story in *The Cornhill* at this time, and Philip has no fancy this afternoon for listening to Mrs. Henderson’s running commentary on Crosbie’s many virtues ! It is patent to everyone who knows anything at all of Philip Fletcher, that there is nothing hard or obtuse about him. He is a sensitive man. Vain as nearly all sensitive people are. And rather greedy of the good-will and opinion of those with whom he is associating. Moreover, he has a deep-rooted dislike to seeing pain depicted on anyone’s face. And he knows well what sort of shadow would fall over Olive’s lustrous velvet eyes if any allusion were made to the troubles of Lily Dale.

They walk away through the village, past the riverside fishing-cottage, on their way up

the valley to fish. And Halsworthy in general and Mrs. Bale in particular are well pleased to see the order of their march. Madge and Philip are sauntering about ten yards behind Mrs. Henderson and Olive Aveland.

Philip is one of the men, who are under all circumstances invariably well-dressed. On what principle tailors whom he never pays supply him with their best broadcloth and their most artistic make, it is impossible to say. Perhaps they like the light-hearted audacity with which he criticises and complains more freely than the majority of their paying customers put together. Perhaps they recognise in his easy manner of entering their shops, when he owes them more money than they ever even hope he may pay, something of the relentlessly brave highway-mau spirit, which made well-bred travellers

relinquish their purses with something like pleasure to Dick Turpin and Tom Faggus. At any rate, whatever the cause, his habit is far "more costly than his purse can buy."

His light grey clothes to-day are judiciously brightened by a buttonhole-bouquet composed of harmoniously-blended pale pink and blue flowers. These attract foolish insects naturally, and one specially fine specimen of the humming-bird moth plunges headlong into the midst of the bouquet, and there whizzes and buzzes with a loudly expressed delight that attracts Madge's attention. Some prescience (women in love are very much like spiders, they see with the back of their heads when the men they love are behind them) makes Olive look round at this very moment, and she sees one of Madge's small hands firmly grasping his grey

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coat sleeve to keep him steady, while with the other she makes frantic dabs at the humming-bird moth which is bobbing about his bouquet.

Olive's own feeling about him is that she would willingly walk ten miles to catch a glimpse of him any day. And she *aches* now as she sees another girl's hand on his arm, although she feels almost (not quite) sure that Madge has no sentiment concerning the happy position that hand is occupying. Olive feels sure that he is looking down into Madge's face with that steady, desperate, ardent look, which she (Olive) has learnt to love better than any other look on earth. "Why can't I hate him, or be indifferent to him?" she asks herself hopelessly as she stares at this little scene, and Mrs. Henderson quietly reads her face.

"Is Phil. anything like that cousin of his

whom you knew once, dear ? ” Mrs. Henderson asks, following the direction of Olive’s eyes, and Olive recovers herself, and remembers how he had called her “darling” the night before, and how he had implied, or she had thought that he meant to imply, that she was the magnet that had drawn him hither, and feels that she can’t betray him to this good motherly woman whose friendship he wants to win.

“Yes, very much like his cousin,” she stammers out as the loiterers come up—Madge with the insect captive in her handkerchief—Philip with his bouquet a trifle mutilated by Miss Roden’s chase through it after the moth.

In spite of her strong feeling that she is unwise to do it, Olive cannot help managing so that she walks next to Philip along the rapidly narrowing path. She longs to have

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him assure her, in the rapid imperceptible fervent way he has of offering such assurances, that it was by no design of his that Madge and himself had dropped behind. She longs to hear him call her "Olive." She longs for the path to become dangerous that he may help her over it. She longs to see him look the "darling" he dare not speak with other ears so near.


Madge's voice raised high in hilarious mimicry of some acquaintance known only to Mrs. Henderson and herself, is wafted back to the pair behind. And when he breaks the silence, it is to say—

"What a pleasant light ring there is in Miss Roden's voice ; she's the best specimen of unspoilt heiress I've ever met in my life."

"She's a dear girl, and I'm very fond of her," Olive says stoutly, though at that moment she is anything but fond of the dear

girl for whom Philip is expressing admiration. Her prophetic soul tells her that Philip has no intention to-day of even surreptitiously resuming the demeanour of last night. Her heart sinks, and she wishes herself a hundred miles away, while he glances unseen at the love-fraught, down-cast face, and can hardly resist kissing its melancholy away, whatever the cost of his rashness may be. But she is not her uncle's heiress any longer, and in "justice to her, he cannot ask her to share his miserable fortunes." "She's not the type of girl to take to wife in an attic on a crust of bread," he tells himself. And as he is no longer afraid of Olive's impetuosity betraying him (the most impetuous women are always easily kept down by love) he resolves to charitably cool off to her from this hour.

The two girls whip the stream for more than an hour, perseveringly and unskilfully.



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Then Olive, in utter fatigue (fatigue of heart not of body) sits herself down by Mrs. Henderson, and as she does so she sees Philip move up nearer to Madge.

She tries not to look at them—she tries to fix her eyes on the distant waving lines of heath-crowned hills, and she fails.

“Child, you’re wretched about something?” Mrs. Henderson says, suddenly, and as Olive shakes her head by way of feebly negating the assertion, Mrs. Henderson goes on—


“My dear, I know better ; very few of us marry our first loves. I am a happy wife and mother now, Olive, but I’ve sickened, and sorrowed, and suffered as much as a woman can suffer and sorrow at the sight of a man who was not Mr. Henderson. My dear, I’ve kissed my own hand after that other man has shaken it ; do you think that a woman who

has gone through the fire, can't see when another is scorched ? is he so like his cousin, Olive ? ”

For a moment Olive thinks that she will explode this deception which her idol is practising. Then she tells herself that “ it would be mean, cruel, unwomanly to do it. He has so few friends, poor fellow. Fate and Fortune have been so brutal to him,” she finally believes. So she just puts her poor little trembling hand up over her aching eyes, and answers—

“ Yes, he is.”

“ We are both very fond of this Phil.,” Mrs. Henderson goes on, “ though he's been with us for such a short time ; my husband and I feel towards him as if he were a younger brother ; this morning Mr. Henderson received an answer to an application he has made for a good appointment, that will be much more



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remunerative than the one he holds now——”

“Has he taken it?” Olive gasps. This is deceiving the blind and winning Esau’s birthright by fraud with a vengeance, she thinks.

“He hasn’t been told of it yet,” Mrs. Henderson says. “Madge and you must dine with us to-night, and hear us give him the good news.”

“What is it?” Olive asks.

“The managership of my husband’s brother’s house. My brother-in-law is tired of active work, and is going to give it up; he says if young Fletcher pleases him it will lead to a partnership.”

He is to be given his chance at last. Poor fellow! he has been kept out of it so long that Olive can do no other than hold her peace, and hope that there is not much

iniquity in this tacit deception of which she is guilty. Poor Olive ! she is fool enough to hope something else too. And that is, when his success is certified he will return to his allegiance to herself. That he will do it she is sure—if Madge does not win him in the meantime.

Really, Madge looks very much like winning him now. She is tired of whipping the stream, and never landing a trout, and so she has pulled in her line and is standing close up by him, talking to him eagerly about the colour of the winding, purplish hills, and the rich, brown sherry hue of the water, and the rarified blue-pink there is in the atmosphere. She hasn't the faintest notion that her friend Olive Aveland, sitting behind her, and watching all her gestures, and her rapidly changing expression, is accusing her of being a profound and consummate flirt.

By-and-by, as their dilatory steps take them a little further up-stream, they come upon another angler, who is fishing lazily the while he is comfortably seated smoking on the trunk of a tree, that has fallen half across the rapid rushing river. At first sight of him Philip sees that he is a fine, good-looking, fair, rather uncultivated young man. That is all. In another minute Philip is informed that this young man, whom he has tried and found wanting so rapidly, is Griffiths Poynter, a young squire of the neighbourhood, recently come into his own, and suspected at once by Philip of having designs on Madge the heiress.

There is something very quieting to these fears, which are not the off-spring of jealous love, in the way in which Madge presently greets this man.

“ What a nuisance that you should have

chosen to-day of all others, to come and fish this bit of the river, Grif," she says, in tones of unmistakable annoyance. "I did want Mr. Fletcher to take home a good basket to-day, and here you have spoilt my best bit."

Philip Fletcher forgives Madge for calling this "new fellow" thus familiarly by his christian name, out of his great gratitude for her not being a bit glad to see Mr. Poynter. He is not a bit in love with pleasant Madge, as has been stated before. And he is very much in love with dark, winsome Olive : but for all this he would not like Madge's inclinations, or fancy, or whatever one may call it, to go straying off in the direction of "any other fellow"—whether that fellow were an old friend or not.

For the first half hour after this meeting, it does seem very much as if Mr. Poynter meant to commit the gross error of attempt-

ing to monopolise Madge. The fact is, rich young squire and landed proprietor as he is, he is intensely shy, and doubtful as to his own merits. He knows full well that he has not the easy go of graceful satisfaction with himself, which is a pre-eminently distinguishing mark of the impecunious Philip. And so Griffiths Poynter frequently suffers himself to drift to some point socially, where he is at a disadvantage and neglected.

The smooth, supple, perfectly self-possessed young man of society without a sou—takes the lead in the most natural way possible, before the young lord of some of the neighbouring soil, who has been made an idol of in his own family, and never roughly handled by fortune all his life. Philip (unconsciously, it must be confessed) adopts an air of patronizing tolerance to the interloper—who owns the property and right of fishing here, and

from whom Madge has never deemed it worth while to ask for a ticket for her friend Philip. And so, presently seeing that Mr. Poynter is being cast into outer darkness through sheer carelessness, generous Olive tears her attention from Philip, and bestows it and a few words on Griffiths Poynter.

It is in the nature of this young man to reciprocate speedily and warmly. If a dog wags his tail at Griffiths, that dog is sure of a kindly pat or a bone. If a cat purrs at him in the fawning false way in which the sweet deceitful creatures do purr when it pleases them, he strokes it, and very frequently gets scratched. And if a woman shows him any favour, he accepts it as a courtier might a kiss from a queen.

Now it must be told that in spite of that declaration of Miss Madge's made the other day to Philip, that she "has never had a

lover," Griffiths Poynter has "cared for her," to use his own temperate uneffusive language, ever since she was a frisky Fenella-like child, and he a big, florid, handsome, strong, courageous, awkward boy. He went on craving for her during his youth-hood, or hobble-de-hoyhood. And now in his young manhood the fondness has deepened, strengthened, intensified itself into love ; into love that he has not told yet, save with his honest bright-blue eyes (the very homes of candour and simplicity), which invariably open wide and let out all their secrets whenever they rest on Madge.

But Madge has not tried, not cared to, not thought of reading their secrets yet. Heart-whole, Madge looks upon him as a trusty, tried, amiable, human mastiff, whom it is good to have within call. While as for him, up to the hour of their meeting by the river,

on this he would have cut his heart up for her, or given up hunting, or committed any other appalling sacrifice that can be mentioned.

Mrs. Henderson, from the heights of her own experience, sits and watches this quartette, and sees clearly that they will not, that they cannot sing in harmony much longer. She knows well (few know better, indeed), how one can "love and unlove, and forget; fashion and shatter the spell," but still she does pity, and fear for those four young people. For she thinks of Olive Aveland, "She is getting to love him for his cousin's sake, and if she shows her love to him, oh ! my poor Madge."

As they walk home late in the afternoon a blessed boulder does compel Philip to place himself close to Olive for a minute, and he whispers,—

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"What could induce *you* to lay yourself out to please that yokel, that yeoman, that—"

"Why don't you call him only a clod at once," she says impatiently, "how can you be so ill-natured and unjust?"

And then all her agony of the last few hours is wafted away in a moment, as he mutters, in a sulky, hopeless way,—

"Because I love you, and can't help myself!"

And as he says it he has to take Olive's hand in his, because the river-side path has become a mere big boulder jutting over the stream at this junction, and with that hand lying lightly, unresistingly in his, why he would be more or less than Philip were he to resist the impulse to press it.

She skims along over enchanted space for a brief time, and then Madge and Griffiths Poynter drop back, for the path has widened,

and Griffiths can't help wishing to talk a little more to that "fair, unaffected, good-natured girl in buff," who saved him from the utter confusion of feeling himself superfluous just now; and Olive, without a thought of the evil she is doing, out of an excess of happiness that has been generated in her heart by that last boulder episode, talks to him freely, easily, almost gaily, and leaves him to think her kind, and good, and beautiful, and almost equal to Madge.

And Mrs. Henderson has a dim perception that something is growing which she never planted, or desired to plant. And is not quite sure as to what it is, and feels that on the whole she will not be altogether sorry when this excellent, dear, handsome, fascinating Philip has gone off to work the vein of good fortune which her husband has struck for him.

At the Vicarage-gate Madge, who treats Mrs. Henderson with the free affectionate insolence of a daughter, darts back to whisper, “ Do ask Griffiths to dinner ; I think he is taken with Olive.” And so Griffiths is asked to dinner too, and goes in radiant and ruddy, “ his eyes and face almost matching his sky-blue tie and ruby pin,” Olive notices. And his light yellow hair has a sheen upon it that oil, and oil only gives. And altogether no one could think of pronouncing this stalwart young rustic Apollo good form.

But through that merry dinner and long friendly evening, Olive Aveland is very kind to him, and attentive to him. She does not do these things with design ; but the fact is, she has herself winced and smarted under neglect a good many times during the last few years. And knowing how it hurts she cannot put

a fellow-creature to the pain wittingly. So in the midst of her tumultuous, almost mad joy (she has drugged her scruples to rest) at the good fortune which Mr. Henderson has announced to Philip, she has time to give kindly words and looks to Griffiths Poynter.

Is she not a woman ?

They sit listening to the low sweet music that Olive is making for them without other light in the room than the faint light of stars. And in the semi-darkness and under cover of the nocturns she is playing, Philip approaches Olive. It is his way to do everything easily and gracefully, and without attracting surprised attention. There are no rough edges about any part of his manner. So now the others do not notice it when he lounges on a low ottoman by the end of the piano and whispers,—

“I must see you alone to-morrow ?”

In the tremulous notes that follow, he reads acquiescence to his request. And he rewards her characteristically.

“Darling!” he whispers, and then rises up and makes way for Mr. Poynter as the lamp is brought in.

“And now Madge must sing,” Mrs. Henderson says, for she feels somehow as if Madge were being over-shadowed by this display of musical proficiency on Miss Aveland’s part, and Madge, who has a voice that is rich and soft as butter-milk, sings “Kathleen Mavourneen” with such sympathy and expression, that the tears well up into Mr. Poynter’s eyes, and he has to give a series of little short coughs in order to prevent them running down over his cheeks, as he thinks what a sad day it will be for him if he ever has to say farewell, “it may be for years, or for ever,” to Madge Roden.

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. WILMOT'S VIEWS.

"Sweet is true love, tho' given in vain, in vain."

As they are parting this night Philip Fletcher slips a card into Olive's hand, and when she gets to her room and dares to look at it, she sees inscribed thereon,—

"I will be at the end of the lawn nearest to the wilderness to-morrow at twelve."

And she presses that card to her bosom, and kisses it, and performs a variety of absurd antics about it, such as first putting it in a casket—presently withdrawing it from there, because the casket has no lock—putting it in her purse and taking it out again, because she

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fancies the filthy lucre may defile it—and finally tearing it up into minute pieces, because she fears it may fall into the hands of some prying servant.

As she finishes tearing it up Madge comes in, and Olive experiences one of those qualms of guilt which one does experience when anything like a secret—however unimportant it may be—has to be maintained.

There is rather a perplexed look on Miss Roden’s face as she puts her candle down, and there is an unwonted degree of hesitation in her manner as she says—

“Olive dear, I have had such a funny note from Mrs. Wilmot.”

“Oh, have you,” Olive says, carelessly, for her head and heart are both so full of Philip that she cannot give any consideration to anything or anybody with whom he has no concern just at present.

"So odd of her to write to me," Madge goes on rather testily, and then she hands Mrs. Wilmot's letter to Olive, and politely withdraws her observation from her friend during the reading.

The letter is written with a pin apparently—the lines are all so sharp and hard, and there is so little ink in them, and the words prick so as Olive reads them. The letter is a request that Miss Roden will kindly fix a day and hour for an interview with Mrs. Wilmot, who wishes to say a few words to her on the subject of Miss Aveland's incomprehensible conduct.

"It's the most insolent letter I ever heard of," Madge says rather hotly when Olive has finished it, "as if you had any need to have consulted her before you came to my house—for I suppose that is your offence."

Olive is only a girl, and she does shrink

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with a girl's undefined fear and dread from any stone that may be thrown at her reputation. Her lips quiver a little as she says,—

"I suppose I was injudicious in allowing Mr. Fletcher to walk home with me the other night when I was in lodgings."

"Injudicious! and he such a friend of mine," Madge protests, "what nonsense, what utter nonsense!" and Olive says, "Ah! but every one doesn't know that, you see," and sighs, and would rather have the sharpest stones thrown at her reputation than hear that Philip is "such a friend" of Madge's.

"If she even hints at anything so impertinent, you won't stay with her a day, will you, Olive?" Madge says eagerly, and Olive shakes her head and says she can't tell what she may do yet. For hope tells

a bright tale to her as she remembers that to-morrow she is going to see Philip alone.

Conversation flags between the two girls after this. Madge, without well knowing why, is mortified a little that her new friend, Philip, should so unconsciously have compromised her old friend Olive by that trifling act of attention. Of course, it is simply ill-nature on Mrs. Wilmot's part, but Madge feels that it would sting her to hear that Philip was dubbed a flirt, however undeservedly. And while she is resolving these possibilities in her mind, Olive is employed in plotting how to make her escape to-morrow at twelve.

Just as she is leaving Olive's room, Madge recollects something.

"Oh! what do you think of Griffiths Poynter?"

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Olive strives to remember what she does think of him. She can only recall one portion of her opinion, which she gives utterance to.

“I think he looks very healthy,” she says.

“And very kind,” Madge puts in, hurriedly ; “if I had a sister, I should like dear old Grif for a brother-in-law. I’d rather see anyone I loved married to Grif than to anyone else in the world, I think.” And as Olive only says “Ah!” to this, the conversation comes to a dead lock, and the girls say “good-night.”

There is a rustic bench planted well into a space that has been cut away for it, in the midst of a laurel hedge at the end of the Moorbridge lawn. The laurel hedge divides the lawn from the wilderness ; and through this wilderness, Philip Fletcher makes his way about twelve o’clock—makes

his way to the meeting with Olive, which he himself has petitioned for.

As he walks along, a passer-by would probably take him for a spoilt, silky, curled darling of fortune. It is his way to look in such a much better case always, than he is in, in reality. For instance, now he is not happy or satisfied by any means, although Fate, working through Mr. Henderson, has put the means of competence, if not of wealth, within his grasp.

Unscrupulous as he is deemed, unscrupulous as he is in many respects, he does hang back and hesitate about accepting this good fortune, which he has won under false pretences. Who can tell where the point of honour is with such a man? He does not hesitate or scruple (much) about winning Madge's heart and wealth under false pretences. But when it comes to a

matter of business—to a dealing between man and man, he loathes his false colours, and is strongly tempted to haul them down.


But "in the case of a man who has once gone astray, the daws peck so fiercely and freely at the heart he may at any time afterwards wear on his sleeve," he thinks. And so, though he has nearly proclaimed himself to be what he is this morning to Mrs. Henderson, he has faltered and fallen back, and only succeeded in puzzling that good woman intensely.

To complicate matters still further, Mrs. Henderson has more than hinted to him this morning, that she greatly lacks patience with men who "fear their fate too much." She, in her blind belief in Madge's superiority to every other created being, thinks that Philip is so dazzled by Madge's worthy merits, that he quite forgets his own. And

so she more than hints at broad disapprobation of men who are laggards in love. And he with a vision of Olive dancing before his eyes, and with a sharp, stinging recollection of that cousin of his whom he is robbing of the mess of pottage so carefully and liberally prepared, feels his tongue tied, and his mind a moral chaos.

He wishes now with all his heart, that he had not proposed this secret meeting to Olive. For though the fascination of Olive is upon him overpoweringly as of old, he has no faith in his own fidelity to her. His love would never stray from her, but his vows would, for his fortunes are too precarious altogether for him to dare to neglect the certain good, the security, the power that would accrue to him through Madge Roden.

But in spite of all these low calculations, all these pettifogging doubts and fears, he



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looks a very exalted being indeed in Olive's eyes, as he comes up to the bench half-hidden in the laurels, on which she is trying to sit as if she had not been there for half-an-hour waiting impatiently for him. Olive is making a shallow pretence of reading, but in the presence of the real, living, breathing, cruelly-absorbing romance that is before her, the shallow pretence falls away, the book slips from her hand, and she rises up to greet him with far too much gladness in her eyes and voice.

For a few moments they sit there side by side, each trying to seem easy and natural, and altogether as if they had met there by accident, and each failing signally. During those few moments Olive gets horribly vivid, painfully acute, impressions of everything surrounding her. She is so highly strung that she feels the soft, tremulous motion of

the leaves over her head vibrating through every fibre of her body. She feels her heart ticking like an ill-regulated clock ; and a stray sunbeam shimmering on the path before her, dazzles her into speculating as to whether that same sun will go down this day upon her happy love.

What she would give—how she longs—to let her head droop on the broad strong shoulder by her side. He has been false as the mirage, and fickle as the public taste to her, and she has every reason to believe that he is these things still, and that he will never be any other. And yet, knowing and feeling this, she yearns for the slightest sign of loving interest from him—she covets every kindly look and word he may ever have given or ever will give to another woman. And a woman who surrenders her heart thus utterly, must always be at a disadvantage.

On the authority of one who was "a poet
and a lover too," we are taught that

"Woman's heart is made
For minstrels hands alone ;
By other fingers played
It loses half its tone."

Philip Fletcher has no pretensions to the minstrel's art ; but the victor in the Battle of the Bards himself would have failed in getting a fuller and more thrilling tone out of this special woman's heart than he (Philip) is getting. And so at last when he says,—

" Well, Olive, we didn't come here to tell each other that it's a fine day, and that the autumn tints are richer than the spring ones," and holds his hand out to her at the same time, she puts hers into it and straightens the figure that had been drooping a moment before, and feels that this is enough—enough to recompense her for any amount of past agony.

"However it goes with me, Olive—however dark and uncertain my future may be, I shall feel it less if I know you're well and happy." And he bends forward as he speaks, and wins her more with one of those ardent fervent glances from the dark blue eyes in which she sees her Heaven and her Hell.

"Well and happy," the girl repeats, tempestuously; "it's so easy to link the two words together. I'm well enough. I haven't a headache or a toothache; I've only——" she pauses on the brink of the declaration that she has only a heartache. The saving remembrance that it is his proud prerogative to woo her with such statement, not hers to woo him, checks her, and she substitutes the words,—

"I've only a wretched feeling of uncertainty about me just now; Mrs. Wilmot has

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‘done with my services’ rather abruptly this morning.”

“Why?” he asks, eagerly. Then he goes on without giving her time to answer him, “Never mind, Olive; you don’t mind, do you, my child? Yours should have been such a much brighter lot; it’s one of the things that a man can’t think of—when he can do nothing.”

The saving clause informs her rather fully of his present state of mind, and she realises that some selfish consideration has battled successfully with the love that is passion for herself. She strangles a sob as she answers,—

“I’d rather not talk of myself, please; tell me what you are going to do?”

“On my honour, I don’t know,” he answers, involuntarily; “make a clean breast of it to Mrs. Henderson, I think—tell her that I came down for a lark,

and renounce the honours that are offered me."

She heaves a sigh. "I verily believe they would be re-offered to you in your own proper person then," she says, thinking the while with quickened pulses of how courageous Madge Roden would respond to the touch of bravery there would be in this man's confessing him and risking a topple. Thinking of how Madge would respond, and of how tempting a response from Madge would be, she adds,—

"Miss Roden will persuade Mrs. Henderson to be very merciful."

"Do you think she will trouble her head about me, when I have dubbed myself impostor?"

"Yes," Olive cries, in her jealousy, suffering the truth to be wrung from her. "You'll let her believe that it was for her sake you

did it, and—and I know what she will feel.” Then she nerves herself to learn the worst without further delay, and says,—

“Look here, Philip; if you ever had a spark of love for me, don’t, when you’re everything to Madge Roden, let her know that you have ever been anything to me.” Then she tries to talk cleverly about it, in weak endeavour to save some portion of woman’s traditional dignity.

“We have played at being many things—at being in love—at being indifferent—at being jealous—at being strangers—at being interested in that way in one another still. Now let us leave off play, and in serious, sober earnest be friends, nothing more.”

“Has it been play?” He has risen up and now stands before her, one hand thrust into his pocket, the other clasping her shoulder to steady her and force her to front him.

"Has it been play? by heaven, *no!* it's been such desperate earnest as you'll never care to inspire in—as you never can feel for any man again."

With all his faults he is such a lover as few women can resist loving.

"Has it been play?" she moans out after him. "Oh, Philip, how much better you know than I do, whether it has or not; but I don't wish to talk of myself; I only wish to talk of you. What are you going to do?"

He shrugs his shoulders with a great air of giving up all things, and Olive says, sapiently,—

"That will do no good; you're not the man to say 'Can't help it,' or 'Things must take their course,' especially now that you have the ball at your feet."

"What are *you* going to do?" he asks, suddenly.

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"I?—oh, I am going whither fate wafts me," she answers, making a gesture as though she flung her future to the winds. "Mrs. Wilmot having given me a bad name, it will cling to me probably, and, when next you see me, Philip (if you ever do see me again), perhaps I shall be so very much in the shade that you will deem it due to your own respectability to cut me ; I shall not be in the least surprised."

He ponders for a few moments, and can't make up his mind as to how he can make his will agree with expediency. Then he takes another false step as the impulse to take that reproachful-looking, loving girl in his arms and kiss her, overcomes him.

"Be true to me, Olive, though I can't claim you openly yet," he mutters in the fulness of that grasping spirit of his, which cannot bear to relinquish anything that

comes in his path. And Olive for one minute struggles against her own infatuation, and her prophetic spirit lashes her into the utterance of an angry truth, as she replies,—


“You will never claim me openly, Philip. I know that well enough; why should I bind myself down to be true to you, when you provide against any unpleasantness through being false to me?”

“So you won’t trust me again?” he pleads.

“Trust you? No!”

“Then only love me, darling,” he says, lowering his voice in a way that proves him an adept in the art of winning, and she acknowledges impatiently,—

“I can’t help doing that—to my sorrow;” and then adds, as the wonderful yearning to be near him comes over her—the yearning which only a woman in love can understand, “When shall I see you again, Philip?”



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“If I only consulted my own wishes, darling, I should say daily and hourly ; but I have your welfare to think of, Olive, as well as my own, and so I must tell you that it must depend on circumstances.”

“Philip,” she cries out, sharply, “I’m trusting you again so foolishly ; you won’t flirt—you won’t seem to love anyone but me when you’re away from me, will you ?”

It is easy to say “No” to this, so he says “No” with an immense air of sincerity. And while he holds her hands, and searches the depths of her eyes with that seeking, devouring glance of his, she believes him.

CHAPTER VIII.

“THOSE WHO HAVE NOTHING LEFT TO HOPE,
HAVE NOTHING LEFT TO DREAD.”

VIVIDLY, more vividly than the majority, who only mark her calm demeanour, would give her credit for, does Mrs. Henderson remember the days of her youth and the luxury of love excitement that filled them.

She is, as she herself told Olive the other day, a happy wife and mother now ; but she has not forgotten the days when other lips and hearts than Mr. Henderson's told tales of love to her. And Philip Fletcher judges wisely in deeming her a fitting recipient of some of his doubts and difficulties.

For she is that rare combination, a patient, clever, impulsive, sympathetic, clear-headed, warm-hearted woman. And "she's but a contradiction still," for being all these excellent things, she is nevertheless weak enough to attempt to work out what she considers a scheme of perfect matrimonial felicity between her two favourites Madge and Philip.

It must be borne in mind, before her conduct is tried and found wanting, that though she has been spoken of as a friend of old Mrs. Fletcher's, that she is considerably Mrs. Fletcher's junior. The gulf of years indeed between the two women, makes her a far more sympathetic and congenial companion to Mrs. Fletcher's supposititious son, the Philip with whom we are dealing.

Her mood is specially good for the reception of a confidence, now as Philip comes

leisurely into her presence, after that interview with Olive, of which the chief details have been given. Her mood is specially good for the reception of a confidence, and the instinct of a woman tells her that she is to be the recipient of one as soon as she catches a glimpse of the young man.

All the daily duties that must be done, have done themselves, as it were, easily this morning. Her cook has been moderately intelligent, and not actually immoderately extravagant in her demands on the butcher during the last week. Her conservatory, to which she attends chiefly herself, has been well supplied with water. Her pet flowers are in their best bloom. Her daughters have just settled down comfortably with a new daily governess, and her dear little friend Madge Roden has been with her for an

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hour, talking a great deal, and blushing a little about Philip !

Yes, it has come to this. Madge has reached the stage when, without being actually in love, without feeling that for a certainty, and, in very truth, the hero of her life has come to her, she blushes and feels flatteringly that in a measure she has a right in him, when she hears the sound of Philip's name. He is miles ahead of the dear, trusted, old friend of her youth, Griffiths Poynter, in her own estimation, for he has that trick of taking a woman's liking without exerting himself which cannot be defined.

Mrs. Henderson is remembering the days of her youth very vividly as Philip comes into that little room of hers which she has boarded off from the big corridor, and decorated according to her own taste. She is remembering these days, not remorsefully,

not regretfully, but clearly and vividly for Madge's sake. And, as she is remembering them, and determining to be very tolerant to any hesitation on the part of the man Madge is learning (has learnt?) to love, for fear anything like intolerance should confirm that hesitation, and cause him to ride away though he loves ;—while she is determining on this course, he comes in, and the kind, languid, clever eyes that meet his see at once that the crisis is come.

There is a fulness, a steadiness, a quiet power in Mrs. Henderson's manner that makes it a very reassuring one to any weaker vessel. Philip feels himself to be the weaker vessel now, as he takes a stool that happens to be at her feet, and begins by saying,—

“I wish I had come under your influence ten years ago.”

She smiles, for the implied flattery is

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pleasing to her, married woman as she is. Albeit, married woman that she is, she knows it means nothing, and she answers half deprecatingly,—

“Ah, Philip! so many men say that, feeling sure that the influence which might have run counter to their wishes can never be brought to bear upon them now.”

In her kind, grand, half elder-sisterly, half-coaxing way, she leans forward and offers him her hand, and adds,—

“But I feel as sure of this, Phil, as I feel sure I love your mother, my influence will never be brought to bear upon you badly. I shall only urge you forward in a good path.”

For half a second more he hesitates, then all the manliness, all the good that is in him asserts itself, and he rises to his feet, looking very grave and miserable, and says,—

“I have swindled you out of this interest—but, for Heaven’s sake, don’t withdraw it.”

And then, clearly and humbly, he tells her all the story of his temptation, his trial, and his inglorious success.

By the time it is told, her eyes are full of tender tears, and her face is quivering with intense compassion. “Poor fellow!” she believes firmly—the whole tone of his narrative has led her to believe—that, though “a lark” brought him here under false colours, love has chained him here.

She likes him very much, this handsome, glorious young fellow, who likes her so well that he trusts her thoroughly. She likes him very much, and so she argues with herself that, as they have all liked him for himself hitherto, to the full as much as they have liked him because they believed him to be somebody else, so no harm can be done by

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suffering things to go on as they are for a while, at any rate. Moreover, he is young, and his youth and pleasantness, and his regard for herself, and her recollection of how tenderly his aunt and all his cousins felt for him ; all these considerations step in and make her pitiful, to a dangerous degree, towards him.

The impulse to be thoroughly honourable and truthful is upon the good-looking good-for-nothing now. Still sitting low at her feet (he argues rightly that if she had been very much displeased with him she would have made him quit that position of proud humility), he goes on to appeal more fully to her mercy, and to cast himself more entirely upon it.

“ I’ll be quite honest at last,” he says ; “ the temptation to take that jolly berth has never been an overpoweringly strong one ; I’ve felt, from the moment you told me of it, that

I could resign it to the right man—to dear old Phil—without a pang. But the temptation not to risk losing your friendship, and Miss Roden’s, has been stronger than any third person can understand, perhaps.”

As he says this, he gives her one of those questioning, eager looks that are so infinitely useful in bringing about his own ends. And out of the depth of her generous belief in his best, she says,—

“If I have any influence with Madge, Philip, you will *not* lose her friendship ; she will appreciate your free resignation of a thing that would have been very valuable to you as highly as I do, I hope ; for it would be the heaviest loss you could have, if you lost Madge Roden’s liking.”

Her words are so plain, her meaning is so obvious, that he is compelled to answer her in an outright manner that he never con-

templated when he commenced his confession. His passionate love for Olive recedes before his ambitious excitement about Madge.

“It was the description I’d had of Madge Roden that tempted me down here to make a fool of myself,” he says gloomily ; “and now that I have made a fool of myself, the conviction that I’m no more worthy of her than the ass was of Titania, is my greatest punishment.”

The thought of Madge growing haggard, careworn, pallid, plain, under the influence of disappointed love for this “young fellow, whose worst fault has been a reckless desire to know Madge at any price,” fills Mrs. Henderson’s mind, and weakens it.

“What if she thinks you worthy, Philip ? Your cousin never can be as dear to us now as you are ; because you feel bound to resign an appointment that is offered to you under

a mistake, you needn't resign every other good that you've gained during your sojourn among us."

"Have I gained her?"

"I can't say that, but I will say that you ought to give her the open assurance that she has gained you; if you don't do it, I shall have my want of wisdom brought home to me cruelly."

Her voice trembles, and she looks altogether rather more "upset" than he had ever imagined cool, clever Mrs. Henderson could look. What a fate! What a girl this is that is almost offered to him! And after all he has not pledged himself to Olive! Only—he loves her.

But when "love" is suffered to be the lord of all, Real Life very often ends in a desperate heart-rending struggle with everyday necessities. And Olive may do so much

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better with her beauty, and her brains! And how heartily he'll hate the fellow who gets her eventually, if he loses her—for there is still an "if" between Olive and the renunciation of her.

By-and-by Mr. Henderson comes in with his boots wet, and his spirits a trifle weary. He has had a long round in the parish this afternoon, and he is not exactly in the mood to balance Philip's claims to toleration fairly.

"It seems to me that the young man has sold her, and humbugged us all, my dear," he says to his wife, who is making the best of Philip's case through the open dressing-room door. And she is obliged to acknowledge that he has done both these things, and that still she likes him, and means to stand by him.

"It was simply that he might make friends

whom he would never have had the chance of knowing if he hadn't done it," she urges, and though her argument is loose, her face is so eloquent that Mr. Henderson refrains from banning Philip with book and bell, and consents to sit down and dine with him.

By the time that dinner is over the offender's offences seem to have become family property, and Mr. Henderson looks upon them with very kind eyes. He will have no further trouble or responsibility about the appointment, for Philip renounces it utterly and entirely, and responsibility and trouble outside the parish are things that Mr. Henderson is beginning to shrink from.

So Philip floats in a calm harbour of refuge, quite safe and comfortable for the time, but very uncertain as to either his safety or comfort directly he ventures out of it. Feeling that it would be very sweet to write to

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Olive, and sweeter still to get one of those open-souled notes of hers in reply, notes in which she throws down her cards as only a trusting, loving girl who is void of all mean suspicion can.

But sweet as this would be, it would be dangerous sweetness for him to taste at this juncture. And so he sends no written balm of Gilead to the poor girl who is thrillingly conscious of the hopelessness and helplessness of her case.

Her instincts tell her to get away from Moorbridge House, to get away from this neighbourhood, as soon as possible. But practical need opposes her instincts. Mrs. Wilmot has “renounced Miss Aveland’s services as governess, not deeming Miss Aveland a fit person to be entrusted with the charge of young and impressionable girls.” So Mrs. Wilmot takes care to tell everyone she meets

in a way, with a fulness of suppressed meaning, which induces every one to question "Wherefore?" Then Mrs. Bale's tale of the midnight ramble "with Miss Madge's gentleman" is repeated and repeated again until it loses all resemblance to the original statement, and poor Olive is regarded as a very black sheep.

Poor Olive really does not know where to go, for the fraction of stipend she has to draw from her late employer is too small to be wasted on unnecessary travelling expenses. Accordingly, though her taste revolts at thus staying on near her lover while her lover outwardly ignores her, she is compelled to do so, at Madge's earnest invitation, for a few days, while she searches the columns of all the daily papers for something that may suit her, or rather for something that she may suit.

And Philip, the while, comes and goes and is freely welcomed always by Madge, and seems to be nearer and dearer to Mrs. Henderson than before, although he has not availed himself of the good service that lady has done him through her husband and her husband's brother. A sort of undefined estrangement seems to be springing between Philip and Olive, and he abstains from telling her that he has made a clear breast of it to Mrs. Henderson.

So a few more suns rise and set upon this state of affairs, without there being any outward variation. Only Madge knows, and Olive guesses with sharp pain, that Philip is becoming the one absorbing object of interest in the world to the girl whose heart will never be treated as a worthless toy, as poor Olive's has been.

In very truth, the ease and comfort, the

peace, and plenty, and power, which are all represented fully by Madge's favour, are proving too strong temptations to him. It would be mere feeble cruelty, he argues, to unite himself with Olive now. She is not the kind of girl to try love in a garret, and living on potato peelings with. Fettered by a penniless wife he would surely be a penniless man all his life. And when the halo of romance died away (how brief its life would be) she might in justice reproach him with having indulged his selfish passion at the cost of all the comfort of her life! No; it behoves him to guard her against herself—against the countless minor miseries that crop up in the matrimonial path, on nothing a year. His folly was culpable enough so far as it had already gone, as regarded Olive. But if he suffered it to go on to the end he had weakly led her to anticipate the other

day, it would become criminal! That his sufferings would be equal to hers was a fact that, surely, proved him blamelessly unselfish in the course he intended to pursue? It was for her sake as much, nay, more than his own that he would make an end of this love that was so sweet—and so bitterly hopeless.

Arguing thus with himself, his conduct soon ceases to appear faulty. Indeed, it speedily assumes a rather lofty aspect in his own eyes. Girls rarely consider consequences; it is the part of the men to be prudent, and to protect the imprudent ones from themselves.

So the days go on, Olive becoming almost hourly more anxious eyed, more pitifully desirous of hearing more loving words from Philip. And Madge almost hourly becoming more and more convinced that in him she has found her hero and her fate.

He has spoken open and rather carelessly to Mrs. Henderson of his former acquaintance with Olive. Spoken of it in a free and unembarrassed way, that shows Mrs. Henderson that *he* has never reciprocated the beautiful brunette's evident predilection for him. And when he has told Mrs. Henderson this, and succeeded in giving her this impression, he firmly believes that all his difficulties about Olive are at an end. Firmly believes that when he has counselled her for their common good to go away and forget him, that it will be all plain sailing with Madge, and that he will never hanker after the girl he loves and means to renounce.

Then comes a day soon when he must needs expound his views to Olive. For a situation offers which she feels bound to accept; she is to be a companion to the young wife of a naval officer who is ordered

off on foreign service for four years, and so the night before she goes, Philip manages to see her alone once more.

"I couldn't say good-by to you before the others," he says, as she comes up to him, in silence, at the trysting-spot he had himself appointed. She has vowed that never again will she make one step in advance either by word or look towards this man, whom she loves better than her life. So now she stands before him with her eyes cast down, and in perfect silence.

If she would only look at him, if she would only speak, he would break the spell that is over him, and caress her even while he crushed her. But her motionlessness, and her speechlessness, combine to check him, to fill him with a sort of undefined awe.

"Have you forgotten that this is good-by, Olive?" he says, in rather a choked voice; "I

have a hundred things to say to you, but while you stand like an unfeeling statue before me, you chill the words off my tongue."

"I know them all, you needn't say them," she answers, in a monotone, without raising her eyes.

"You must hear me," he begins, trying to seize her hand, but she draws it sharply back, and clasps it in the other high up over her bosom. As she stands thus bending back a little, with slightly bent head, and tightly clasped hands, there is a wealth of hopeless love, of futile fury, of desperate anguish in her attitude! Her beauty is so glorious, her misery so tempting, that he loves her more than ever in the moment of renouncing her.

"Good-by," she says hoarsely, after a minute. And then she turns and walks

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away, leaving him with all his arguments unsaid. Leaving him with his heart and brain burning—leaving him with a sense of such discomfiture upon him as he has never dreamt of experiencing about loving, devoted Olive. At the last she has triumphed!

As to her, she goes back to her room with that wofully gnawing pain in her breast, which is the proud portion of the majority of women whether they triumph or are triumphed over in this way. Goes back and packs up her things, and tries to still the ringing in her ears, and to listen to Madge’s blithe, hopeful prognostications of the “better days” that must surely be in store for her—and can do nothing but feel in every fibre, in every nerve, that it is over! over! for ever!

There are tears in Mrs. Henderson’s and Madge’s eyes the next morning when Olive bids them farewell. But Olive’s eyes are dry

and bright—no one knows how hot and aching they are.

"We shall all miss her," Mrs. Henderson says, a little sadly, as they go back into the house after watching the carriage out of sight round the corner of the drive. But though she says it sadly, she is rather glad than otherwise that the foreign element is removed from their *coterie*. It is high time that Philip and Madge should come to a clear understanding.

Philip has not come down to the house to see Olive off, but as the carriage drives rapidly through the lodge-gate, she sees him leaning on the railings by the side of it. And as he turns one miserable, passionate glance towards her, he sees her head droop forward on her hands, and hears the deep cry that is beaten out of her by this final blow to the hope of her life.

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So for a time his path is very clear. But he can't follow it for a few hours. The whole of that day he spends in some place in the heart of the moor, where only a few stray red deer can gaze with pitying eyes on the form of a man stretched on the purple heath. And not even the red deer can see whether or not the eyes that are so closely covered with his hands are dry or full of tears.

In the evening he is at Moorbridge House ; “all the better for his splendidly invigorating outing on the moor” he tells Madge. And then he whispers to her—

“ Will you give me half an hour in the garden ? ”

She knows well what is coming, and frankly as a child might she answers,

“ Yes—I will ! ”

CHAPTER IX.

MADGE'S TRUST.

"And indeed her chief fault was this unconscious scorn
Of the world, to whose usages woman is born."

VERY gravely, almost solemnly, the young man who has always been so carelessly happy, so uncommonly *debonair*, and contented with things in the order they are going, offers his arm to Madge, and leads her away out of earshot of the open where Aunt Lucy and Mrs. Henderson are sitting.

As the fair, gracious-looking young pair grow faint shadows in the dim light on the lawn, Aunt Lucy says, with a little sigh,—

"*My* vocation will soon be gone."

"You wouldn't have wished her to remain

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as she is all the years of her life ?” Mrs. Henderson says quickly, “this must come about sooner or later ; and if Philip is the man, why not Philip as well as another ?”

The argument is unanswerable ; at any rate Miss Roden, senior, does not attempt to answer it, she merely slips on one side of it and says,—

“I am more satisfied than I should have been if you and Mr. Henderson were not responsible for him ; as it is, you both love Madge too well to have lightly wished her happiness.”

For a few moments Mrs. Henderson suffers sharp pangs of doubt and remorse for her share in the transaction. Then she hastens to exonerate her husband.

“Whatever happens,” she says decisively, “however this may turn out, and I do think that they love each other, and will tell each

other so to-night, my husband has done nothing, either to forward or to hinder it; men are not so alert in such matters as we are; he has seen nothing of it."

"But you have seen it grow," Miss Roden says, "even I have seen it, and you're a quicker woman than I am; I've seen it, and sorrowed over it, and though I'm here to take care of the child, I've not dared to move a finger."

"Young blood will have its course," Mrs. Henderson sings, a little tremulously; "if we had moved fifty fingers it would have been just the same."

"Think of her coming back to us presently," Miss Roden goes on, with loving jealousy, "with the flush of that new interest in her face, and that young man, who's nearly a stranger, more to her than either of us! I can hardly bear to think of it. Why

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couldn't he have fallen in love with and married that poor friendless girl Olive, a husband would be a boon to her ! ”

Meanwhile Philip has led Madge out of ear-shot, and fought his battle. He will not weary her with tedious recapitulation or long pleading.

“ I have two things to tell you,” he begins, speaking rapidly, but steadily and clearly, “ I am not the man you believe me to be, and I wish you to be my wife.”

Whatever she may feel when these two announcements are made to her thus simultaneously, Madge Roden does not manifest any surprise ; she just lifts the eyes that have a shade of bronze brown in the shade, and of almost golden radiance in the light, up to his face, and he sees that she does not recoil from him. And in spite of his craving for her money, in spite of his liking for the

girl, in spite of the general dislike men have for being rejected, he is sorry for it.

There can be no going back now. Renegade as he is to his faith to Olive, renegade he must remain, for there can be no going back, no faltering, no hesitation in his dealings with this young lady. All these thoughts rush through his mind as Madge gravely scans his face, pausing before she gives her answer, yet she only pauses for a few moments. Then her answer comes,—

“Before I ask you who you are, I’ll promise to be your wife, Philip.” And somehow this perfect trust in him, displayed so unsparingly, displayed without effort or appeal on his part, touches him to a deeper repentance than he has ever felt in his life before.

Madge is not a girl to deal in half-measures. Having waited and been very

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watchful over her own heart for what she believes to be a long time, and having at last discovered what she believes to be genuine love for him in it, she is ready to pour out all its treasures freely upon him now ; ready to acknowledge him openly before all the world as the real happy Prince for whom she has waited in her enchanted palace.

He finds it easy enough to tell all his story now to the girl who so quietly accepts the situation of being the sharer of his life, his prospects, and his thoughts. He tells how hearing of her fired him with the desire to come down and win her. And as he refrains from telling her why he desired to win her she finds she cannot be a severe censor about that bit of lax morality, and he winds up by telling her that for the last ten days Mrs. Henderson has known him as he is, and has remained his staunch friend despite that knowledge.

"I thought there was something below the surface when you wouldn't take that appointment," Madge says, and she thinks that there was something very noble in that act of abnegation on the part of a man who was often in dire need of a shilling ; for Philip Fletcher is not guilty of the folly of seeking to seem better or richer than he is before this girl who is taking him upon trust so thoroughly, but who, for all that entire reliance, has the wit to find out everything she pleases.

"I have just seventy pounds a year of my own, and I have never had the knack of keeping any situation more than a couple of months," he tells her, with an uneasy laugh, for the confession implies that he must be content to owe all to her in the future ; but Madge spares his pride prettily in her answer,—

"What a lucky thing that I have so much,

isn't it, Philip?" Then (she is a mere girl still, full of romantic generosity and high feeling) she goes on to say, "You will never crush me by seeming to remember that it was mine before it was yours, will you, Philip?"

"Your friends will probably spare me the trouble, Madge; on the face of it the look of the thing is against me, or would be against me," he hastily corrects himself, "if you were not such a fascinating little thing that no man could be with you without losing his head, and forgetting his fortunes."

So he babbles on, as men will to girls to whom they are professing affection, whether they are feeling it very strongly or not. And Madge likes the novel sensation of listening to authorised declarations, and hanging with both her pretty hands on the arm that only she has a right thus to lean, she

feels contented, and wouldn't change her Philip who has won her in disguise "like a knight of old," she thinks, for an army of honest adorers like Griffith Poynter.

As they go back to the room where the lamps are burning now and the moths hovering about the same with suicidal recklessness, and the two ladies waiting for what they each feel sure of, with every degree of satisfaction, Madge behaves unconsciously quite like the young queen of a rich realm about to raise a prince of inferior station to a share in her throne. She has been sovereign lady all her life, it comes quite in the order of things that she should act as a sovereign lady now at this crisis ; there is no bashful hanging back, no waiting for the man to make the announcement ; it almost seems to both the aunt and the friend, that she leads Philip forward as she says,—


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“ We have come to ask you for your congratulations, for we are engaged to each other ! ”

Miss Roden feels a thrill of satisfaction in the midst of her aggrieved sensations, it shows that Madge realises fully that she is the one conferring the greater honour. Old Miss Roden is a kind-hearted, rather liberal-minded woman about most things ; but just about this one matter of marrying and giving in marriage, she is inclined to be very hard on, and illiberal to, the men, not one of whom has ever chosen her. Theoretically Madge has always stood out for there being complete equality in matrimony, when two hearts are joined together. But this practical betrayal of the fact that she felt herself to be the most important element in this special arrangement, “ is more to be relied upon ” her far-seeing relative thinks.

And Mrs. Henderson marks that little act of leadership, and though she knows it is unconscious, she feels more sorry to see it than she has ever been to see any act that Madge has ever committed in her life before ; for she knows that if Madge does not resign the reins, they will be wrested from her, and she gains this knowledge from Philip's face as Madge is making her announcement.

However, all is happiness and harmony to-night. The young people talk over their plans and intentions in moon-lighted corners, and servants rush about and serve the elders with a sort of smirking alacrity that proves they know very well the determination their young mistress has arrived at. These latter, by the way, begin to hope already that "he" will know his place, and remember that they are beholden to Miss Madge, and not to him !



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Altogether this future, for which Philip has played falsely and forsworn Olive, does not look too fairly before him for poetical justice!


The Fletcher family at Chelsea hear of and rejoice in the ne'er-do-well's good luck presently, though they shake loving, disapproving heads over the way in which that good luck has been compassed.

And Philip the genuine, Philip the hard-worked, Philip the cousin of Madge's future husband, having earned a holiday at last, promises to spend it at Halsworthy.

It is market-day at Winstaple, and Winstaple is only five miles from Halsworthy, so the Halsworthy people frequently drive over there on market-days, for the pleasure apparently of meeting each other out of their own parish. Madge has a pair of splendidly smart-stepping cobs which she drives in a

little wagonette, and on this special market-day, she takes them along under a bright autumnal sun at a rapid rate into Winstaple. She has adroitly substituted the wagonette for a low pony carriage—in the latter, either Mrs. Henderson or Philip would have seemed to occupy a subordinate position behind. Courtesy wouldn't have permitted Philip to let Mrs. Henderson sit there. And, inclination wouldn't have permitted Madge to let Philip sit there. His place is by *her side* now, and in the wagonette he can take his place naturally without any derogation from Mrs. Henderson's dignity.

Madge, it must be confessed, goes into Winstaple this afternoon with a very pleasant sense of importance upon her. The man whom all the Winstaple world will know she is going to marry is sitting by her side, and he is as handsome as a star. As she turns



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her cobs into the yard of the “Red Lion” they all see Griffiths Poynter dismounting from his horse, and they all remember that the last time they saw him, Olive was with them, and that he seemed to admire Olive.

The burden of congratulating Madge is the heaviest one that has ever been laid upon Griffiths, but he takes it up gallantly, and comes forward, a very deep flush on his florid face, and a shimmer of hot tears in his blue eyes, and says the commonplace words :

“They tell me I have to congratulate you, Madge. I do it heartily, I’m sure.” And he grips the hand he has coveted for so many years, and detests Philip with all his soul for the cool way in which that young interloper stands by and seems to take it all for granted. All involuntarily, and quite without any design of giving Philip offence

he turns to the happy young lord lover and says, even while Madge is thanking him,—

“And you’re to be congratulated a good deal more—for we all know what Madge is.”

Philip bows very stiffly and superciliously, and Madge feels annoyed with him for the first time. Out in the world, of course, they will be equal, or he may be acknowledged the superior without let, hindrance, or questions from her. But just here, he needn’t grudge her the honour and glory that her own subjects like to accord her.

“Dear Grif,” she says playfully, “you always thought too highly of me,” and then, somehow or other, without design on the part of any one of them, she passes out from the inn yard into the High-street by Mr. Poynter’s side.

Philip meanwhile prowling behind with Mrs. Henderson, and who from having gone through this sort of thing understands

well that Madge is only bringing certain and sure retribution and tribulation upon herself. Philip, with a downcast and moody face, is less pleasant to behold than usual. If this is a specimen of the way in which Madge means to quietly assert her individuality—her well-authenticated claims to being a free agent, and quite independent of the will or wilfulness of others, he has made a bitter bad bargain, in spite of the Moorbridge estate and the two thousand a year.

Presently he gives vent to his dissatisfaction to the lady who begins to experience the sensation of having played with edged tools—to say nothing of fire :

"A misfortune it is for a girl to have been brought up in the wilds."

Mrs. Henderson has known other homes than Halsworthy, and has gone through a good deal in them that makes her life at

Halsworthy seem faint and shadowless. But she has been the wife of the vicar of Halsworthy for many years now, and she is too loyal a woman to hear it disparaged without a protest.

"Fortunately for us whose lots are cast here in the luxuriant west, we know nothing of the wilds where it's bad for girls to be brought up."

"I am not speaking of the soil, but of the social barbarity of this region," he replies savagely, for Madge knows many people to-day in Winstaple, and is graciously and gladly greeting them in company with Griffith Poynter.

"My idea is that a girl should never venture outside the barrier," he goes on as he stalks past Madge and Griffiths, who are flattening their noses against a photographer's window; "anything that calls for remark—that

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makes any section of the world look round, is bad style, according to my idea.”

“ Really ” (Mrs. Henderson is fairly nettled now with her favourite. How can anyone dare to hint at a fault in you, frank, faultless Madge ?) “ Really ! I’m afraid you’ll find that a very large section of the world will look round in most utter bewilderment when Madge marries you.”

‘Don’t you throw the inequality of our fortunes in my face,” he says in a harsh tone ; “if she requires a man to be the slave of her caprices, on account of it, she should have taken the bucolic by her side now ; he was willing enough.”

“So were you, Philip ?” She says it questioningly he notices, for he is a man who by reason of his extreme selfishness is very sensitive to the faintest shadow of a change in tone or expression.

“Can you doubt it? Is she not the load-star that drew me here? Didn't I play a very dubious part indeed, for the sake of her fair face?”

He says all this in a way that makes this staunch friend, this impetuously ardent admirer of his, feel that after all, she knows very little about him. Almost in spite of herself, she had arranged in her own mind, how Philip would deport himself during these difficult days of courtship. And here he was acting in a way that appeared to be utterly at variance with the nature of the man as she had known him hitherto. She did not know that all this spurious jealousy, all this apparently over-weening sense of his own importance, all the captious conduct which had succeeded his former cool calm, was the offspring of his love for and remorse about Olive. And so being ignorant of this, she

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failed to read the riddle Philip had aright.

As she is wondering for the fiftieth time whether the laws of Nature, and of the gods, are not more to be trusted to work out good in matters matrimonial than the advice of matron friends, quick footsteps behind them, and they are checked by a breathless exclamation from Madge—

"Do come back, Philip ; Grif and I are going to be taken at Hamilton's, and you to be done too."

She would paint splendidly, he could see as he looks at her, for her golden-brown hair is blowing lightly, like a cobweb, about her chignon, and her eyes are sparkling, and smiles are dancing on her face. But according to his taste she photographs badly, look like a "Prairie Flower" or a "Forest Flower," or some other

resquely untidy specimen of feminine beauty. And probably as she ran up to him from Griffiths Poynter, she would run back to Griffiths Poynter from him. He disliked the whole tone of the episode, and showed that he disliked it in the way in which he refused to go to Winstaple's chief photographer, and be put into Mr. Hamilton's best position for a lover ; and reproduced by the sun.

And Madge listens to his curt refusal with a heightened colour ; and walks back slowly with a sore feeling in her heart, and a marble wobbling about in her throat, to rejoin Griffiths at Hamilton's.

" Won't he come ? " Grif asks, opening his eyes wide, and expressing wonderment all over himself, as Madge comes into the shop with a look of mortification on her face—the first he has ever seen there.

" Philip says he never has been, and never

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will be photographed,” she tells him briefly. And then he feels that he will, as the Americans say, have anything but “a good time” with this young lady for the remainder of the period they are doomed to spend in Hamilton’s shop. He guesses the cause : the men who are left are apt to be keen about any shortcomings on the part of the men who succeed them. But though he distrusts and detests Philip for it, he reflects sagaciously that it will be anything but a policy of peace to express his distrust and detestation to Madge. So he goes on fiddling with the photographs on the counter, and feels it almost a relief when a cumbrous woman, followed by six children, comes in and greets Madge with effusion.

The whole party are carefully arranged for representation in Mr. Hamilton’s best style evidently. The lady is ample, and

to-day her amplitude is magnified by a stiff silk. Her complexion is a steady, unvarying magenta, and the whites of her eyes are so yellow that they suggest acrimony and bile to all who look at them. These eyes kindle now as they rest on Madge. There is no doubt whatever that Mrs. Wilmot is delighted to see Miss Roden ; so delighted, that there must be a special cause.

CHAPTER X.

THE PHOTOGRAPH.

“Shall a light word part us now?”

MR. WILMOT, the husband of the lady who is regarding Madge with blithely bilious eyes, is the solicitor who manages what is called down here, “the Poynter property;” therefore it is with Griffiths a matter of habit and interest, quite as much as of courtesy and feeling, to give her gracious recognition whenever he sees her, however untoward the sight of her may be.


She bows out a greeting to him now, as he makes all his features curvet in a smile that is about as natural as a spurred horse’s

prance. He is too dejected to wish to interchange ponderous *badinage* with the lawful spouse of his legal man of business just now, and she looks as if she had any amount of unsaid words ready to say to him. On ordinary occasions she commences conversation by saying to him,

“You haven’t been near us lately, Mr. Poynter,” but she adopts another mode of salutation to-day, and says as she gives his hand an emphatic squeeze,

“I’m sure I thought for a minute that you were Mr. Fletcher.”

“You couldn’t have thought so for a minute,” he responds rather gruffly, “for you only caught sight of me the instant you spoke.” He feels unaccountably annoyed by the insinuation contained in Mrs. Wilmot’s speech. He has a vague notion that it will annoy Madge ; not fathoming the truth that



Madge will never feel annoyed about Philip through anything that a third person can do or say.

At this, Madge, still looking downcast and slightly annoyed, is called away to take her place opposite to the mind-quelling instrument in front of which we have most of us passed some intensely unhappy moments. The day is sultry, Winstaple High Street is dull ; and Mrs. Wilmot gets impatient as more than half-an-hour elapses, and still Madge does not come back to them.

"Miss Roden must be very difficult to take—or very fussy about being taken," Mrs. Wilmot says to Griffiths : and Griffiths rejoins,—


"She certainly isn't fussy, but I daresay hers is a difficult face to catch correctly—it's so full of expression."

"Yes ; not a good feature in it, and no repose about it," Mrs. Wilmot says, com-

placently surveying her own fleshy well-settled features in the glass, "a nice-looking girl though to my mind ; that girl who was, I grieve to say it, in charge of my children, was not a patch on Miss Roden."

He hates her for speaking of the divinity of his life as a mere "nice-looking girl ;" but he hates her more for the imputation she casts upon Miss Aveland.

"I can't understand your grief in the matter of Miss Aveland," he says looking at her sternly ;—and those blue eyes of his that waver, and water, and flicker, and do a variety of absurd things when Madge is confusing his faculties, can look very stern indeed when mere mortals such as Mrs. Wilmot do wrong to his sense of right,—
"unless indeed you grieved as everyone else did, to see Miss Aveland occupying a subordinate position."



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Mrs. Wilmot's pendulous purple under-lip purses itself up at this. Then she opens her mouth with a snap, and says,

"I can only say I *hope*, though I *don't* expect it, that Miss Aveland will be more prudent in future," and Griffiths feels savagely that she is referring to that midnight walk with the invincible Philip which has been well bruited abroad.

Madge comes in now, radiant, delighted with the negative which has been shown to her in relief against the coat-sleeve of the artist in a dark closet where the smell of chemicals had made her sick. And Mrs. Wilmot instantly folds her mouth into a more amiable form, and says ingratiatingly,

"I was going to call on you, Miss Roden, to ask you to forward something which I found belonging to Miss Aveland after she left my employ ; I don't know her address,

and have no desire to hold any communication with her myself."

Madge's face grows scarlet as she listens to this exposition of ill-feeling which cannot be fairly fought. She puts her hand out, and takes what Mrs. Wilmot gives her, and as she does so the scarlet ebbs from her face for one moment, and then comes back in a cruelly burning wave as her eyes light on the photograph of her lover, and the words "from Philip to Olive," written underneath.

It is a cruel blow to the girl who has been so full of trust in him—and in Olive. For a few moments she quails in a way that makes Griffiths regard her wistfully, and causes Mrs. Wilmot to open her eyes in assumed surprise and say,

"I'm afraid the heat of the studio has upset you, Miss Roden."

"No, it hasn't," Madge says quickly. Then

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she collects herself, and (it comes so easy to Madge to be straightforward in this extremity, for it is the habit of her life) then she adds,—

"I was staggered for a moment when I saw it was Mr. Fletcher's photograph; I'd forgotten that he had told me he knew Miss Aveland very well some years since; thank you, Mrs. Wilmot; I will certainly send it to her."

"She must be foolishly fond of the young man if that doesn't open her eyes," Mrs. Wilmot keeps on all the time she is sitting to Mr. Hamilton. "I'm sure, when I was a young woman, I was always up at the least slight, much less any attention to any other young lady; but la! girls in these days put up with anything to get husbands; in my time we knew what was due to us."

Meanwhile, Madge is trying to determine

not only what is due to herself, but what is due to Olive, and to Philip. Madge is no perfect monster, and the discovery of this good and intimate understanding which must formerly have existed between her lover and her friend has nettled her more than a little, since neither of them have taken any trouble to inform her of it. But in the midst of this natural nettled feeling, there rises up a strong counter-current of belief in the liberty of the subject—of recognition of the right that each human being has to keep his or her own counsel. If a hundred girls are in possession of photographic attempts to reproduce Philip the Magnificent, what right of complaint has she? So she argues, and all the time she feels as if the photograph, and the words written underneath it, were burning holes in her pocket.

. At length she decides that she will say to

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Philip, handing him the *carte-de-visite* at the same time—say as cheerfully and easily as she can,

“ See here, Mrs. Wilmot found this in one of Olive’s drawers after she left ; I suppose you gave it to her years ago, didn’t you ? ” say this, and leave it to him to offer any explanation he thought proper, and then forward it to Olive. Just as she comes to this decision, Mrs. Henderson and Philip come in, and clearly the mood of the latter is dark. Madge, with a wisdom that many a wife after years of experience would do well to take example by, resolves now to wait ‘until they are home again ; not to spoil the day for Philip, “ if by any chance he should feel vexed at this likeness of himself having turned up.”

“ How long you have been, Madge,” Mrs. Henderson begins ; she is determined that

all the fault-finding shall not come from Philip. The broad injustice of his complainings may not strike Madge so forcibly, if someone else indulges in them too.

“Yes, it’s long, tedious work being photographed, isn’t it, Philip?” Madge answers wearily, for since Mrs. Wilmot shot that arrow of hers into the air, everything has been long and tedious with usually vigorous, atmosphere absorbing Madge. She makes her appeal to Philip in a little entreating way that is new to her, for she is thinking that he may perchance be annoyed with her by-and-by, for not now at once giving him an opportunity of offering her that explanation which “really does after all” seem due both to herself and to Olive Aveland.

And he falls into the natural manly error of thinking that it is her conscience smiting her. “She feels she has outraged propriety

by running all over the place with that yokel," is the way he words it to himself. He thinks it will be a good lesson to "this spoilt country-bred child," to make her feel it still more, by showing how men of the world regard such derelictions of female duty in the case of the special females who owe duty to them. Accordingly he adopts a stiffer, more reserved manner than is quite seemly even in tolerant Madge's eyes. And as they go home that evening she credits for the first time the assertion that she has frequently heard made ramblingly, that an "adoring lover may develope into a stern task-master."

But before they go home they meet Mrs. Wilmot again. At a confectioner's this time, where she is extravagantly regaling herself on the most airy of jam puffs, and economically filling up space in her children with

rotund penny buns. Each young Wilmot is pastured, so to say, about the middle of a broad, brown table land of bun when Madge and her friend go in, and they crop off the remainder hastily with a view to more, for they know well that so long as Miss Roden "stays talking to Ma," they may eat on with impunity.

"That dreadful woman is absolutely making her way to us, with an air of being sure of a welcome," Mrs. Henderson whispers, in comic despair, as Mrs. Wilmot surges down the middle of the shop towards the corner wherein Madge and her friends are ensconced. Whereat Madge, who feels very genuine despair at the prospects of another collision with Mrs. Wilmot while that photograph remains unexplained, unmentioned, at the bottom of her pocket, says,—

"Do let us be civil to her, please," and

looks shy and shattered, in a way that is quite novel.

Mrs. Wilmot is a woman who has never in the whole course of her life done anything that is either culpably foolish, or morally bad. Yet for all that she is an abomination to many people whose tents are pitched in the same region as hers.

"For," as she herself says to an enterprising fellow-labourer in the field of planting, nourishing and cherishing many weeds that are noxious to her neighbours, "I make a point of speaking my mind, my dear, and of saying what I think ; but I must say for myself that a husband of mine has never been embroiled by me." And this does not mean that she has several husbands liable to be embroiled, in stock, but that Mr. Wilmot's predecessor is resting in the grave undisturbed by any back thoughts of an

“action for defamation” brought about by the lively tongue of his wife ; and that Mr. Wilmot is such a pacific, well-meaning fellow, that society at large for his sake pointedly ignores any blisters caused by the working of Mrs. Wilmot’s tongue.

Madge has a piercingly keen recollection of all these attributes of Mrs. Wilmot, as she says, “Do let us be civil to her ;” instinctively Madge feels that Mrs. Wilmot is aware of having her (Madge) at an advantage. “If she’s awkward enough to mention it to Philip, it will be the one straw too much for this poor camel to-day,” she thinks, in half comic, half genuine fear, and she hurriedly resolves to fly from her foe.

“Philip,” she says, rising up, “I want to go and get some broad envelopes, will you come with me ?”

“Ah ! I thought from the likeness to the

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photograph that this must be Mr. Fletcher,” Mrs. Wilmot says, interposing her person in the path between the chairs which Madge had been about to take ; “ I was just going to ask for an introduction, Miss Roden.”

In an agony of annoyance and embarrassment Madge makes Mr. Fletcher known in the conventional manner to Mrs. Wilmot, and then indicates that she is ready to go on.

But Philip, out of sheer captious wilfulness, affects not to see this. Madge has put him out this day, and he can't resist the inclination to punish her, even in this petty way. For some reason unknown to him, Madge evidently desires to get away from Mrs. Wilmot. Therefore, she shall be thwarted, and compelled to endure that lady's society for exactly so long a time as seems good to Philip.

“Quite a pleasure to meet so many friends and acquaintances in Winstaple, I’m sure,” Mrs. Wilmot goes on, with her largest smile, “the best treat my little people have had for a long time ; it’s the reward I give them, Mr. Fletcher, for application to their studies ; I bring them into Winstaple, and so kill two birds with one stone, as one may say, for I do my shopping, and they see a little life,—so good for children to see a little life and society, you know : rubs off the rusticity which creeps over girls brought up in the country, unless they are remarkably fortunate in their governess, which we all know my children have not been.”

Mrs. Wilmot shakes her head in a gloomily regretful manner as this flood of words ceases. During the continuance of it the others had sustained that look of feeble, flickering, vague interest which is apt to



creep over any countenance when its owner is listening to one of those stories without end, interest, or incident, which an unwise majority are so fond of telling. But Madge has concentrated all her attention upon it, dreading as each word falls that the next will contain some allusion to that oppressive photograph.

The young Wilmots, meanwhile, having patiently plodded through the broad, dreary expanse of bun, are now taking gay little flights over the aromatic regions of lemon-cheese cakes, and citron cakes ; steeped in a sweet sense, the while, of these things being forbidden joys, for their indulgence in which painsome penalties will have to be paid by-and-by, when their excellent mother gets them safely back into the sanctuary of their own home.

Nevertheless, for all this full knowledge they have of the darkness of their future,

they are the only happy people in the shop. For the mistress of it, though she does not dare to check their ravenous raids upon her daintiest bits of epitomised indigestion, is the slave of a dreadful doubt as to whether she will ever be paid in full or not. Mrs. Wilmot has a fine appetite, and a horrible habit of beating down every unhappy vendor of anything who may approach her. Moreover, the young Wilmots dart with such fay-like rapidity from one dish to another, that it requires a ready reckoner, indeed, to count the cost of all they devour.

“Come, Philip, I must get my envelopes,” Madge says when Mrs. Wilmot’s first burst of eloquence has come to a close, and Philip provokingly pauses to say,—

“I won’t say good afternoon, Mrs. Wilmot, for we shall find you here when we come back, shall we not?”

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"What did that woman mean by knowing me 'from my likeness to the photograph?' " he inquires as soon as they are in the street.

"Oh! I can't tell," Madge hastily ejaculates, for at that moment another batch of eager acquaintances stop her. A bevy of girls this time, who like the pattern of the jacket and tunic she wears, and so accompany her to the stationer's, and then back to the confectioner's, in order to get these garments well defined in their mind's eye, so that they may go home, and "carry them out." And when they get back to the confectioner's, Mrs. Wilmot is still there, and Madge begins to realise how potent are the minor miseries of life in working wretchedness.

She stands in a little fidget now, as Mrs. Henderson settles the bill, and Philip begins

to talk again to Mrs. Wilmot. The true secret of his being attracted towards this woman is to be found in the repulsion he feels for her. She has maligned his always dearly loved Olive, and indulging this specious courtesy of his is a deep-rooted determination to make her smart for that maligning. Additionally, he feels a certain amount of pleasure in showing that "fellow Poynter," that he (Philip) is not the slave of Madge's lightest caprice.

"I have been sending invitations out to-day, to a little gathering for croquet and music next week at Rittering," Mrs. Wilmot is saying to Philip, as Madge who is quite transformed into "Fine ear," stands by expectant of—she hardly knows what. "I hope we shall see you all, Mr. Fletcher; quite a pleasure I'm sure to make your acquaintance; photographs very inadequately represent the

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human face divine as a rule, but I was prepossessed by yours the moment I saw it ; *good-by*, delighted to have met you all ; *good-by*.”

They, the Halsworthy and Moorbridge House party, get out of the shop at last, and now Nemesis rushes up, overtakes and nearly crushes Mrs. Wilmot. Her healthy, hearty, hungry six have nearly cleared the counter, and she has not even the maternal felicity of feeling that what they have eaten may do them good.

A dozen trifles crop up, and make Madge defer bringing the photograph to the fore, until the evening. Then she stands by him, leaning her arm on his shoulder very trustingly, as she says,—

“Mrs. Wilmot found a photograph in Olive’s drawer after she left ; she gave it to me to forward to-day ; it’s of you, Philip.”

Has the bolt fallen ? Must he renounce the place, the position, the love, security and fortune that Madge can give him ?

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. TOLLINGTON.

“ ‘ Love must cling where it can,’ I say.”

MRS. TOLLINGTON is in what she herself calls “one of her nervous states” this morning, and the cause of her being so must be briefly described.

Mrs. Tollington has been spoken of as the “young wife of a naval officer” just now ; but in justice to the veracity of the parish register wherein her baptism was entered thirty-five years ago, it must be admitted that “youth” and Mrs. Tollington had seen the last of each other for some time.

But she belongs to the large army of

those who dispute this ground of "youth" inch by inch with time. And in this unceasing warfare, she was greatly assisted by her limpid eyes, and a liquid voice, and a general air of being rather too ethereal for this work-a-day world. Her eyes and her veins are so very blue, and her long tendrils of curls are so very bright and fair and silky, and the figure (that of an evening is encased generally in a "baby-body" with the newest apologies for sleeves) is so very slender and willowy, that on the whole no one can be very much disgusted with Mrs. Tollington for calling herself a "mere girl still"—a mistaken notion which has been fostered by her marriage with a man who is, and who owns to being, sixty.

Mrs. Tollington is quite sufficiently endowed with this world's perishable wealth to be able to indulge herself in her "ner-

vous moods," her companion (our old friend Olive), and a well-appointed house on breezy Blackheath. She has given the verdict in favour of Blackheath, for three reasons: the first is "its widely acknowledged healthiness;" the second is, her "dear sister is settled near—has married into poverty, and may need her (Mrs. Tollington's) heart-and-purse aid sometimes;" and the third is, that there is a deep and charitable joy to her in living thus well surrounded among the shabby remains of a band of people who had been powerful in her genuine girlhood, who had snubbed her when she was living in Greenwich Hospital where her father was a lieutenant, and who "are so glad to recall their old intimacy with her," now that she is the petted wife of a man who shortly will have his flag.

The two first reasons Mrs. Tollington

gives out openly to everyone who cares to listen to them, regardless of the fact of their being utterly false. The third reason she cautiously represses, regardless of the fact of its being thoroughly true. But don't think, from this exposition of her weaknesses, that she is a fool pure and simple, otherwise her conduct will perplex you as much as it did Olive at first.

She came down to breakfast this morning in one of her "nervous states," with a white muslin and blue-ribboned dressing-gown on, and an expression of fatigued annoyance on her neat passionless face. And as Olive noticed the expression, she inwardly girded up her soul for endurance of all that the expression portended.

"Look here, Olive," Mrs. Tollington begins, holding out an envelope that has been broken open, "that goose Maria brought

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this to me, and, without saying that it was addressed to you, I opened it, and out *this* tumbled" (here she hands Olive a photograph of Philip Fletcher); "and then naturally, seeing such a handsome young man, I read the letter; and when I'd done that, I found it was addressed to you. What does it all mean?"

"It means," Olive says as steadily as the sudden vision of even this poor semblance of the never-forgotten, still-idolized old love will let her, "it means that a photograph, which I left behind, has been returned to me."

"Of a young man—and such a handsome young man! Is he your lover?"

With such pain, such humiliation, and such regret that he is not, Olive stammers out,—

"No!"

"Then why do you look like that?" Mrs.

Tollington asks in an aggrieved tone. "I can't bear to be deceived; and when I thought I had lighted on your secret by accident, I did feel vexed that you should have kept it from Captain Tollington. I am still quite young enough for Captain Tollington to be very anxious about the friendships I form with men during his absence; and of course, if you have a lover, he will come here, and I shall see him."

"And I must live with such a woman as this!" Olive thinks. But aloud she only answers,—

"Pray don't be uneasy: the original of this is neither my lover nor my friend; he will never come here;" and her voice sinks almost to a whisper as she announces this fact, which ought to be such a satisfaction to her. Why is love, the noblest of the passions, such a promoter of lies, and double

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dealing, and deceit generally ? He may make men “ fierce, tame, wild, and kind ; ” but I know that he very often makes women cowardly, cruel, and false to everyone on earth but the loved one.

“ Then, being neither your lover nor even a friend, you won’t mind telling me who he is ? ” Mrs. Tollington purrs. Mrs. Tollington likes handsome young men, and the prospect of not seeing the original of this pleasing photograph is not agreeable to her, as she had made up her mind to see him. So she asks the question with just a slight flavour of acidity (these sweet fair women always turn acid on the smallest provocation), and gives Olive to understand that it is a portion of her duty as companion to answer all questions asked by her employer.

“ He is a Mr. Fletcher ; and really I can tell you nothing more about him.”

“Why does his photograph arrive in this impressive and mysterious way, then?”

“I can’t tell you, as you have not given me time to read the note that came with it yet,” Olive says, bouncing up from her seat, with her nose in the air, forgetting for the blessed period of one moment that she is in bondage, which forgetfulness on her part Mrs. Tollington carefully notes down on the tablets of her memory, with the design of showing Captain Tollington “how very foolish it is to rely on a sheep-dog who growls when her own peccadilloes are found out, and her own little game spoilt.” For Olive is the child of an old friend of Captain Tollington. She is here against the wishes of Captain Tollington’s fair wife; and so all these derelictions from the straight path that companions ought to follow are noted down, and treasured up in a certain storehouse,

where they will gain greatly in flavour and strength by the time Captain Tollington comes home.

Olive goes out of the room, and can't stay to reach the sanctuary of her own bed-room before she reads the note. It is short, and unsigned ; but how well she knows the peculiar turns and twists and flourishes of each capital letter ! What a mixture of strength and weakness, of indecision and obstinacy, in the writing that only Philip can have penned !


No date, no address, no signature ; only these words :—

“Do you wish to have done with me altogether ?”

There is savagery in the sentence, and she feels it, and thrills in exquisite agony in response to it. And yet too there is something in the savagery that soothes the pain she

feels. For she knows he would not give way to it, if he did not love her still. And then she wonders "what has happened at Halsworthy since she left;" kisses the photograph that is all of him that is left to her; and—remembers that it is her duty to go and hear what Mrs. Tollington's plans are for the day.

Shall I tell the secret of all this loving folly of which a girl is guilty, who loves with head and heart, with heat and force, as this poor Olive does? Her very cleverness, instead of being a safeguard, only increases the pain of it all. For though she knows full well that she is being made the fool of hope, whenever she lets herself hope that it will all end as she desires, still she can't help indulging in the imaginings which are destined to destroy her ultimately. Even now, as Olive goes down to her duty, there is an exultant throb at her



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heart, an exultant light in her eyes, an exultant colour like a red flag in her cheek, as she thinks, “ He can’t forget me.” And all these exultations drop down dead an instant after, as she remembers, “ but he has left me.”

Mrs. Tollington has a pony carriage drawn by two plump, tame, handsome, grey ponies, which she is fond of driving about well under the observation of all such of her old friends as have not these luxuries at command. She delights in making a progress down Crooms Hill, through the High Street and Hospital, well in sight of the still poor friends of her youth, who have many of them grown fat and poor, while she had still remained slim and young, and waxed rich. Oh ! the joy of it—the justness and beauty of it ! No wonder she forgot to think of the means by which this fitting end has been attained. No wonder that Captain Tollington, broiling for

his flag under a Mediterranean sun, is rather less to his wife than the beasts that perish.

She whips her phlegmatic ponies daintily down Crooms Hill, and shrugs her neat shoulders contemptuously as she passes regiment after regiment of the same unmated beings who were girls when she was Miss Smith. And as she passes one very large sisterhood whom she knows to have done their ball-going and general showing-off duty very nobly, the fact of "its all being a game of the sheerest chance" strikes her forcibly afresh; and she says, turning suddenly to Olive—

"Why are *you* not married?"

Olive is in a day-dream—a day-dream of lounging on green turf, under green trees—of love and Philip Fletcher. But she wakes from it gallantly as Mrs. Tollington asks her this, and answers with such lavish recollec-

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tions of all that might have been if Philip had only been strong and true,—

“ Why ! why indeed ! ”

“ Really you seem to take it very much to heart,” Mrs. Tollington says languidly, leaning further back in her carriage, and encouraging her plump ponies onward ; “ but,” surveying Olive over her left shoulder, “ you are a good-looking girl, and it must be annoying to find that the men of this age don’t appreciate your style of good looks. I have always thought them so foolish to think so much more of blue eyes and light hair ; and I have told them so over and over again.”

“ How you must have been troubled by their admiration ! ” Olive says, indifferently.


“ Troubled !—trouble is no word for it, my dear. Poor papa was so particular, that I really shrank from meeting any new man. I don’t know how it is some girls are so run

after, and others who are much worthier and better, and who would really make better wives, are left to wear the willow."

Through some peculiar twist in human nature, no girl of twenty-two likes to be called "worthier and better" than the women who have grabbed all the loaves and fishes. Olive is quite conscious that she is a goose for feeling it, but she does feel very much annoyed with Mrs. Tollington and her pretensions to fascination, as she replies—

"And what a Triton among minnows Captain Tollington must be, for you to have kept yourself steeped in your enchanted sleep till he appeared!"

The allusion to the sleep that lasts until the real "Happy Prince with joyful eyes," the true "right man," appears, is quite thrown away upon Mrs. Tollington. She does not understand it, and therefore resents it.



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"I can tell you I could name six or seven girls who were trying to catch Captain Tollington," she says a little indignantly, "and I carried him off without trying to do it: not that there is anything contemptibly easy-going about him, as you seem to imply."

"Oh! Mrs. Tollington, *no*," Olive exclaims, roused into explanation; "I didn't, really I didn't, imply anything of the sort; I only meant that he must have been greater than the others to have won you from them all."

"He had been posted for some years," Mrs. Tollington says musingly; "and there is something so flattering to us girls in being *trusted* entirely by men who might be our fathers, you know. But *what* I went through mentally before I could decide——"

She pauses here, not because she is in the

least shy about stating what her mental doubts were, but because she is not sufficiently imaginative to be able to coin a few on the spot. And Olive, girl as she is, gauges the reason of that pause so thoroughly, and despises the inadequate proportion of it so heartily.

They are in the middle drive of the Hospital grounds by this time, and Mrs. Tollington, by flourishes of her whip, is indicating where So-and-so used to live when she was here "as a child." How is Olive, the recipient of her information, to know that she is making her childhood extend to twenty years? Pouf! 'tis but a paltry difficulty, this, and Mrs. Tollington surmounts it with the gallantry of an irresponsible nature.

"How *jealous* the people were of me here, to be sure," she says, with a meditative air, as she drives slowly along through the well-

known grounds—"jealous of a child of fifteen, who didn't know whether she was being admired or not ! Wasn't it wicked ?"

"But how did you know that the women were jealous, when you didn't know that the men gave them cause to be so ?" Olive asks, with an air of abstraction that is rather offensive to one who has been laying herself out to tell the whole thing in a narrative form that will sound well. And just as Mrs. Tollington answers, pettishly, "As if one couldn't always tell about the *men* !" Olive sees Philip, one of a group of five men, smoking on the balcony at the end window of the "Trafalgar."

She dare not faint, and she dare not find fault : social decorum forbids her doing either, because she is—powerless. There is nothing left for her to do but to sit back in the carriage, and bear the agony of passing

him and not speaking to him. For Mrs. Tollington drives well down under this window, in order that she may have all the credit to be gained by the fact that she can turn her ponies moderately well at the end down by the railings; so Olive even hears his voice.

“What’s that you say, Ritchie? ‘Phil’s last bachelor dinner?’ Let us howl! My dear boy, I’ll give you a better dinner than this any day at Moorbridge House.”

She hears these words. The full meaning of them is borne in upon her mind. She realises in an instant that the man who has this day written to her, to ask if she “wishes to have done with him altogether,” is up there talking to other men about Moorbridge House and his power there. And his power there means power over Madge—the “power of love.”

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She understands it all, she realises it all, and she can't help herself. She leans back and turns up her dark, gleaming face to the balcony, where Philip and his friends are sitting, and she cries out, "Oh! take care," for she sees that Mrs. Tollington in trying to follow her example, and look up too, has involved her reins, and caught the carriage wheel in the step of a ponderous brake, and they are smashed over in some way or other, and the ordinarily placid ponies are kicking one another.

There is a great commotion, and very little real assistance rendered. Mrs. Tollington's youthful groom has been precipitated from the hind seat, and is weeping over his tattered coat and bruised cheek, and the rowing he will get from the housemaid (who has to mend his clothes) by-and-by. He is young—much too young, and small, and

tightly clad to be useful in any emergency. Naturally, he is incapable at this moment ; and so the young men from the balcony rush down to their assistance, and by the time the much-mangled carriage has been pulled free from the much-astonished ponies, Philip has recognised Olive, and Olive—has made up her mind what to do.

Be herself ! Do herself so much right at last ! Show him that she “is no more scorched than he is !” So she resolves. But, ah ! how hard the task she has set herself, when she reads the genuine anxiety that is in his eyes, as he recognises her—flies to her—takes her hand, and mutters,—

“Olive ! my darling, are you hurt through that fool’s mismanagement of her miserable ponies ?”

This is his first impression of Mrs. Tollington.

CHAPTER XII.

PHIL !

“ Oh ! love is such a mystery, I cannot find it out.”


It is five days after the photograph episode, and Madge is trying to make herself believe that she has forgotten it, or, at any rate, that she is not worrying herself about it. When she handed it to him, and spoke her speech that night after the Winstaples experiences, she had been full of generous unwillingness to perplex him by the smallest sign of a desire to know anything at all about it.

But now, on reviewing the case calmly, undazzled by the glamour of his presence, she

does recall every light and shade that had made the incident a picture to her ; and she does feel that she has not been quite fairly treated.

This is how it was. She handed him the likeness, as has been told, saying at the same time, " Mrs. Wilmot found this after Olive left, and gave it to me to-day to forward to Olive." She had lifted her eyes to his, and hers were very full of faith, but, at the same time, there was a questioning look in them.

Instead of replying to this questioning look as she had half hoped he would, he had merely given her one of those long effective looks of his, from his deeply, darkly fringed blue eyes—a look that was very beautiful to behold in itself, and regarded as an abstract thing ; but that was not entirely satisfactory to a girl who was craving to hear that " it all meant nothing."



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She can't bear to do it, but in spite of all her efforts to the contrary she does admit to herself, as she sits alone this day, that “Philip's going off to town in that way was very funny.” Even the Hendersons didn't know why he went; and what “made it more awkward,” poor Madge felt, was that to her he had said “family business called him,” while to Mrs. Henderson he had pleaded the necessity of seeing an old friend who was just on the eve of sailing for India.

She can't bear either to look back or to look forward this morning. Behind her she sees quagmires of direct double dealing and false pretences; and though she has passed over these in safety, how about the future? Will it be so again and again; or will the ground be all fair and firm—all in reality what it seems to be?

In her recently engendered doubtful frame

of mind, Madge does what is very natural — tries, namely, to keep her anxieties and distrusts to herself, and so shun the observations of others. And it is so hard to do this in the village life where they all know, and like, and seek her ; where they are all so familiar with her, that they talk of her marriage perpetually, honestly believing that it must be the pleasantest topic, and that in fealty to Queen Madge they must air it constantly.

Even Mrs. Henderson's fine perceptions desert her, Madge thinks, a little pettishly, as a note from the Vicarage is put into her hand—a note of earnest entreaty that Madge will drive Mrs. Henderson over to luncheon at Parkavon, Griffith Poynter's place. The excellent young man has a widowed aunt, and a host of cousins staying with him ; and these latter are clamorous for amusement.

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In the innocence and loyalty of his heart, he does believe that the highest form of amusement to be offered to any human being is a sight of Madge Roden.

Philip has been four days away from Halsworthy, and to-day she has heard from him for the first time. Intuitively the girl feels, as she re-peruses the letter just before driving off for her old friend, that it is not the letter a man would write to his “dear and only love,” though he uses the phrase. It is not the letter of the man she has waited for, shutting her heart the while against the advances of all others ; it is not the letter of the lover for whose coming she has looked with as sweet and blind a faith as “Little Elsie” had when she sang,—

“ I will have a lover,
Riding on a steed of steeds ;
He shall love me without guile,
And to him I will discover
The swan’s nest among the reeds.”

Philip says a great deal about the many slopes and dear shady glades of Moorbridge Park ; a great deal about the happiness he has tasted there, and the charm of the girl who has made that happiness ; a great deal about the Hendersons' magnanimous kindness, and the generous view his aunt and cousins have taken of what he is pleased to call his "freak ;" but absolutely nothing at all about what he is doing in town, or what detains him there.

"Have I been a precipitate fool," the girl can't help asking herself, "or do men always let you go thus far and no further into their real lives ? It's rather unfair. He knows all about, and I know——"

She dislikes finishing the sentence. After all, there is something humiliating in making full confession of knowing nothing at all of one's future husband. So she hums the first

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few bars of her favourite waltz by way of finale to her sentence, and tries to wonder "what Griffiths has got going on at Parkavon."

It's a long drive to Parkavon, and a long portion of the drive is through the "Poynter property." The talk between the two ladies is of Griffiths and his belongings (naturally of them) for a while. They conjecture as to the cousins and aunts. They speculate as to whether these latter will "try to marry Grif." They surmise that, whatever they are, "they're safe not to be half good enough for the dear old fellow." "In fact," Madge puts in with an uneasy laugh, "no one is but me. I ought to have married Grif myself." And then silence falls on them, and they ruminate.

How Madge dreads the breaking of that silence. How she flicks her ponies with unwonted force, hoping to make them fly

over the ground that intervenes between themselves and Parkavon before Mrs. Henderson can say anything. How she almost gasps as Mrs. Henderson shakes silence off, and says with an effort—

“How is Philip, dear Madge ?”

“Quite well, I suppose,” Madge says, becoming absorbed in the contemplation of the off trace at once. “I hate driving these cobs on the cheek ; I shall take them on the middle bar coming home : grooms are as stupid as—other men.”

Mrs. Henderson knows that there is a sore, and fears greatly to press on it. But there may be as much pain in silence as in speech. If Madge thinks that the subject of Philip is evaded, she will be justified in being hurt and annoyed. Mrs. Henderson collects the shattered remnants of her faith in the affair being a promising one, and says,—

"Though he was a stranger to it three months ago, Halsworthy isn't Halsworthy without Philip. I shall be so glad when he's back—in his proper place."

Silence on the part of Madge. Presently Mrs. Henderson is sorry to find she is not surprised to see that Madge is crying.

"My darling," she says, tenderly, "supposing he were in either service, and ordered away for three or four years; compare your position with that of hundreds of girls who love and marry officers."

"If he'd been *ordered* away and compelled to stay, I should be happy enough," Madge says; "but I think he liked to go, and I feel he likes to stay. There, I've said it."

Palpably the subject had better be dropped. Therefore Mrs. Henderson drops it, and Madge feels sorely that Mrs. Henderson is as


doubtful as herself of the wisdom of all the work of the last few weeks. Accordingly they ruminate again for a mile, and then Mrs. Henderson makes another effort in what she firmly believes to be a perfectly safe direction.

"Have you heard how Olive is getting on, dear?"

"No; I wrote to her telling her of my engagement to Philip, but whether it's 'out of sight, out of mind' with her, or whether she has never had my letter, I can't tell; I only know that she has never answered it."

"Perhaps Mrs. Tollington's demands on Olive's time leave the poor child too worn out for letter-writing, or perhaps——"

"Oh, please don't," Madge interrupts; "it doesn't matter. I should never exact love and attention from anyone who didn't render both willingly."



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"What would you do, Madge?"

"Give up," Madge says, firmly: "one can always do that, you know. Here we are; and oh! dear, I am too tired to care to speak to anyone."

Parkavon's "portals open wide" to receive her. In other words, a footman opens the front door, and Griffiths runs from the drawing-room into the hall to greet her.

"Where's Fletcher?" he begins with effusion, to cover the bubbling up of the bliss he feels in holding Madge's hand, and looking into Madge's face, in his own house. "I asked you to get him to come, Mrs. Henderson."

"He's in London," Madge says, briefly. "Come, Grif, take the goods the gods give you, and be thankful, and don't hanker after the absent; *I* don't."

"Does she mean it?" both Grif and Mrs.

Henderson ask themselves, as she goes on with her fair face red as a rose. And it really seems that she does, as she turns to them, all colour and animation, and says,—

“I like meeting strangers; where are your aunt and cousins, Grif?”

“In here,” he says; and they go into a drawing-room, where seven ladies sit on seven chairs, working at seven pieces of lace-work.

“My aunt, Mrs. Wainwright; my cousins, the Miss Wainwrights,” he says, comprehensively. “Mrs. Henderson, Miss Roden;” and as he names Madge, such a gleam of pride in her, and longing for them all to admit that his pride in her is justifiable, irradiates his face, that Madge can’t help contrasting the love that has never been told in words, with the other of which Philip is the exponent.

The Wainwrights are not essential to my story. They cannot claim the honour of

separate portraiture. A family group, hastily dashed in, is all that is necessary.

The mother is weak, widowed, wearifully anxious to see her daughters well married—or married at all. The daughters are big, buxom, all wearing chignons of exactly the same shape and size, all speaking in exactly the same slightly strained and very artificial tones, all looking about the same age, and all hoping for the same end.

From the day the eldest reached the age of twenty (and the youngest is twenty now), Griffiths, their cousin, has been regarded by them as their legitimate and proper prey. They had each in succession grown up at him, and each failed to gain him. And each has felt inclined to resent the efforts of the one who has gone before as a piece of personal injustice towards the current fair foe to Griffiths' peace of heart.

But the clannish feeling obtains with them greatly ; and they are always ready to unite their forces and declare war upon any outsider upon whom Grif turns a commendatory eye.

Madge Roden has been cited to them, quoted to them, extolled to them by unguarded Grif, until they have come to the pass of putting wrong lace stitches in at the bare mention of her name. At the sight of her, is it any marvel that they prick their fingers ?

The seven chairs on which they sit become seven seats of judgment the instant she enters, and they all find her guilty of "designs" on Griffiths. For Madge, who brims over with cordiality and kindness, is being gracious to the full extent of her graciousness, is shaking hands with them all, and admiring the view, and saying how

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"nice the dear old room looks with a lot of ladies in it," in a way that the Miss Wainwrights denounce in the secret recesses of their souls as "simply audacious."

And all the while Madge's thoughts are wandering. Is it right—is it just to her sex that she, so petted and sought and made much of by other people who are nothing to her, should allow herself to be treated as a nonentity by the one who is everything to her? She is longing, longing to ask Grif if all men are alike in this. But she remembers just in time that Philip does not like Grif, and so she forbears.

They have luncheon presently, and all the Miss Wainwrights gurgle in subdued mirth in chorus, as something is said about the head of the table. When their mother is inducted into it, she regards each one of them deprecatingly, as if she would say, "I

am ready to resign it to *you*, beloved child, at the lightest hint from him." But he does not offer the lightest hint, and they all sit down as guests, with Madge somehow as the honoured one.

And how they hate her for this honouring to which they do not subscribe, and to which she does not aspire! They think she "means" so many things of which she is entirely guiltless. For example, they rather think that she thinks "their presence here at Parkavon may affect the influence she is trying to establish over Grif," on whom they look as one fated to be theirs eventually. And all the while they are thinking these things, and half hinting these things by their manner, poor Madge is striving not to be self-absorbed in her miserable half-doubts, half-fears about Philip—about her love for him and his for her.

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It is a relief to her when luncheon is over, for she can't eat, and she knows that her want of appetite is being noticed, and sensitively dreads its being ascribed to the right cause. And shrinking from this, she confirms all the Miss Wainwrights' convictions that she is “a designing puss,” by saying “yes” heartily when Griffiths asks her to go out in the grounds with him, and look at a new garden he has just had made at some distance from the house.

The Parkavon grounds lend themselves to picturesque gardening very well, for a river full of cascades runs through, and their undulations would be called hill and dale in another part of the country. This new garden is in the old romantic English style that obtained before Dutch stiffness and Italian artificiality set in. Through such a garden the gallant queen, who is always

being picked to pieces in this age, because of her capacious heart, may have walked with Leicester, and Sussex, and Hunsdon, and Raleigh amidst the odours of roses, and jasmⁱⁿines, and gillyflowers, and sweet marjory. Shaded by huge shrubs and trees, cooled by running water, rendered fragrant by the old familiar flowers that each of them had known from their childhood, it is no wonder that a sort of restfulness settles down on both Madge and Griffiths as they step into the bounds of the enchanted spot.

“I’m so glad you didn’t bring a band of your cousins with us, Grif,” Madge says, in a languid tone ; “they will talk so much—in sentences—that it’s hard work to listen to them, and harder work to answer ; it’s so *sweet* to sit and say nothing sometimes.”

“You were never one of the very silent ones till——”

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"Till?" she questions firmly, steadily fixing her eyes on his, and braving herself to hear the truth at last.

"Well—till your engagement," he says, hesitatingly, blushing a good deal as he says it, for Madge is still the dearest thing on earth to him.

She shakes her head involuntarily.

"I suppose it's so with all girls, Grif," she says, pleadingly; "it is, isn't it? It's such a change; and one's past life seems to be all nothing, and the future seems so very important and uncertain; and it is so with all girls, isn't it, Grif?"

There is an exquisite air of anxious appeal in her eyes, in her voice, in her manner. But Grif is nothing if he is not candid, so now he says,—

"Not with girls who are happily engaged, I think, dear."

And Madge turns and leans on some railings that are marking out the new garden still, and her eyes look out steadily on the gleaming, blooming flowers and the bright foliage, and see nothing ; and she cannot contradict him, or even argue with him.

As she stands thus, a bold, free footstep falls upon their ears, and presently, as Grif is saying, "People often stray in here from that wood, through which there is a public right of way," there comes through the bowery hedge of shrubs the figure of a man.

A stalwart, lithe, supple-jointed man, who walks out freely, and looks about him with interest. He is dressed in rather common tourist garb—grey clothes and a white felt hat, and he carries a knapsack on his shoulders. He strides out well from the

hips, and his tones are those of a gentleman, decidedly, as he stops in surprise, doffs his hat to Madge, and says,—

“I fear I’m a trespasser. I’ve lost my way in getting out of that wood ; will you be kind enough to tell me a short cut to the high road ?”

There is the shadow of a something they have seen before, both Griffiths and Madge feel, as they look at this man and listen to him. And he meanwhile is looking at Madge under his level, lowered lids, and thinking, “Here’s the realization of my ideal of an English girl. Lucky dog ! that fellow by her side.”

Griffiths Poynter has never in the whole course of his life done a chilly act, or uttered a repressing word. He feels, somehow or other now, that it behoves him to make amends for that seductiveness in his grounds

which has lured this wayfarer out of the right path. So he says,—

“Come on to the house, and have refreshment, at least. I can promise you dinner and a welcome. My name’s Poynter.”

“And I,” the other says, “am Philip Fletcher.”

CHAPTER XIII.

A BREAKDOWN.

“Falser than all fancy fathoms, falser than all songs have sung.”

Mrs. TOLLINGTON's little carriage has been mended, and Mrs. Tollington's little ponies' nerves have been restored to their pristine strength, and Mrs. Tollington's mortification at having caused an awkward upset just when she desired to shine as a female Jehu has evaporated ; and still her “rescuer,” as she persists in calling Mr. Philip Fletcher, calls daily to make inquiries about her at the house on breezy Blackheath.

His attentions are very pleasing to the fair lady who rules in this house. He is hand-

some, and he has the gay art in perfection of adapting the style of his converse to his hearers. With Mrs. Tollington he is disgusted to find himself drifting into a feebly vivacious sentimental strain, whenever Olive is out of the room. And Olive, in spite of the momentary weakness—the glorious weakness that will obtain while love and the world lasts—which made her say, “Oh ! Phil, with much loving effusion, when Philip picked her up from under the ponies’ feet, and called her his “darling”—Olive rarely stays in the room with him.

As the magnet draws the needle, so Philip in spite of his troth-plight to absent, unsuspecting Madge, is drawn by that house on Blackheath. Daily he tells himself that “it isn’t his will or his wish that takes him there ; it is fate !—and a precious wayward fate too.” Courtesy compelled him to call at

first, and inquire for the gushing, grateful wife of the man who was soon coming home to be made an admiral. And though she scarcely spoke or looked at him on the occasion of that courtesy-call, still his false feet and his false hopes carry him there daily. At Mrs. Tollington's earnest request, be it understood; for Mrs. Tollington has evolved a theory in her own manœuvring mind. She has sharp sight, though her glance is but a languid one, and she has taken keen note of Olive's quick change of colour, of the quivering of Olive's eyelids, and the passionate droop of Olive's eyes, whenever Philip Fletcher appears. "She loves him, and has tried and failed to catch him," the experienced matron thinks. "It will do her good—teach her a lesson—to get him her to show her that he takes more pleasure in *my* society than in hers; though I am a married woman, who

never, of course, can be anything but a friend to me."

In her heart Mrs. Tollington calls Olive "a sly, artful, specious impostor" for having said what she did say about Philip, the day the photograph came. "He has evidently had to repulse her," Mrs. Tollington thinks; and she moralizes over the "forwardness of some girls," and thanks Heaven she is not as they are.

In pursuance of her plan of teaching Olive a lesson, she gives Philip Fletcher a pressing general invitation to her house. "I will not lose sight of my preserver," she murmurs meaningly. "Captain Tollington must know and thank you when he comes home." She tells the story of the courage and self-devotion he displayed, "risking his life to save hers," when the two small ponies were tumbling about in their traces,—tells it to

all the social winds that blow about Blackheath, and they waft it everywhere. She claims him as her special Providence provided friend, and gets him to walk in the lime-tree avenue with her, when she hopes that all the stalking sisterhoods she meets are heart-sore with envy at not being escorted in a like manner.

And Philip—selfish Philip—suffers the claim of friendship to be made, and seems to agree to it, and walks with her, and talks to her, and flatters her folly, and all for the sake of getting a look from Olive that is never given—a word from Olive that is never said. He loathes Mrs. Tollington's gratitude. He hates her assumption of friendship and intimacy with himself. He scornfully laughs at her evident belief in his interest in her. But he goes on flattering her folly, because she brings him near to Olive—brings him

near to the girl he has renounced, whom he loves better than he will ever love anything on earth.

And for what end is it that he does this after all? He knows that he has forfeited all right to long for that love. He knows that Olive will never let him touch the tips of her fingers again with tenderness. He knows that all this dalliance is the idlest waste of time—that nothing can come of it, save greater unhappiness to himself,—and yet he goes on hovering about her, seeking to win some slight return from her, with an intensity that startles himself almost.

He has his periods of remorse, too: the worst of us have them. His conduct to these girls is the “conduct of a blackguard,” he knows, and he does not scruple to tell himself so. There is not a moment in the day when he would not, if he could, cast himself

at Olive's feet, or clasp her to his heart, and cover her face with kisses. And yet he means to marry Madge! And the two girls know each other, and are friends; and he has sought them both so warmly! And well—he is "a scoundrel," he knows. But still he goes yet again to Mrs. Tollington's house.

He arrives there one day, just after Mrs. Tollington has gone out for a drive with a friend, leaving Olive Aveland alone. It is a late autumn or rather early winter day, and Olive in her restlessness can't endure sitting in a bleak fireless room. Mrs. Tollington's arrangements are all sumptuous as regards herself, but rather screwy as regards other people. It is her custom to spend a goodly portion of each day in her dressing-room, watching her maid altering and re-contriving her garments of price. Accordingly the fire

is there, and the drawing-room is kept clean and chilly until the evening.

The companionship of the maid is no more agreeable to Olive than is the chill atmosphere of the drawing-room ; accordingly she goes out into the rather pretty gardens, and walks about among the battered geraniums and mignonette, and the stiff, sturdy dahlias and chrysanthemums, recalling there, as she did everywhere else, the shattered romance of her life.

If she could only crush her love for this man, who had shown himself worse than "unworthy," who had shown himself "regardless" of her, out of her heart ! If she could only have a satisfactory answer to her prayer, that she "might be fickle," granted her ! If she could only see some other man, whose eyes and hair, and tones and turns of thought, and walk and words, would haunt her !

Was it always to be going on like this, that she couldn't forget him, and ached horribly at the memory of him ; or would he in time tire of others, and come back to her ? Her heart bounded with joy at the possibility which she had conjured up. Some girls tell us they "have too much pride ever to think of a man who has slighted them." They may be telling the truth, but I know that Olive Aveland's love was not after this sort. If he had slighted her ninety-nine times, and caressed her the hundredth, she would have forgotten the slights, and enjoyed the caress as only a woman can.

In the agony of her mind as she wanders about the damp garden-paths she asks herself, What she can have done that she should be singled out to endure such pangs, such gnawings, as these ? What can she have done ? Why should other women, her

inferiors in head and heart and beauty, be married to the men they loved, while she was left forlorn in this way? And what was there about Philip Fletcher to make him the one man on earth to her?

"I wish I could hate him," she mutters. "I wish I could laugh at him; how will he look when he gets old? Just like other men, with no teeth, and bald spots on their heads, and punchy figures. Oh! but I'll be old too, then, Philip; and all my youth will be passed without you!"

She walks fast, fast, faster, round the garden, and aches to have him beside her, "though it would be no good if he were here—it would all end in nothing," she says in a paroxysm of loving sulkiness. And just as she says it, he comes right into her path; for he has caught sight of her from the exalted door-step; and at sight of him, the girl

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paradise where fever rages at

They try to be conversational, and he tells
her that he has come to call on Mrs. Tolling-
ton, and that, finding Mrs. Tollington out, he
has ventured to walk round the garden, and
won't you say you're glad to see me, Olive?"
he utters humbly, in such a low voice.

"Glad to see him!" How can she tell
him she is, when she's trembling so that
she can't make her breath come right, and
can't regulate her steps? She takes two or
three short, quick ones, and then goes falter-
ingly and slowly; and she knows all the while
that he is looking at her with that concen-
trated gaze which she once so loved to meet.

She calls herself a "fool," an "easily won
girl," and she can't succeed, the poor en-
thusiastic child, in feeling anything like cold-
ness or attention to the cause of her folly.

All she can feel is, "He has come ! he has come to me."

Everything protrudes itself distinctly, and makes her abstractedly conscious of it ; the damp yellow gravel path, that looks rather like bruised sponge-cake, glares at her, and the limp hanging trusses of geranium, that were a vivid scarlet before the last rain, lop forward over the border and clamour for her pity ; and she can only walk on, just as straight as she may, between all this vegetable matter that seems to be sympathetically out of joint, and wish, oh ! so heartily, that she could dare to snuggle her head down on the shoulder of the man at her side, and there whisper out all her love and doubt and agitation.

Is not this an ignominious and ill-regulated state of feeling ? "The creature !" to suffer love to reign in her heart for a man who was

not ready with the offer and the Ring! How horribly human, and detestably womanly! Surely all Mrs. Grundy's daughters will be advised to shun her, and to take no further interest in her fortunes. To go on loving when it is no longer expedient to do so! What a pity this poor Olive lacks the convenient powers of unloving and forgetting directly it would be advantageous for her to do it!

" Won't you say you're glad to see me ? " he repeats, and the truth is pressed out of Olive by the repetition.

" You know what I am, better than I can tell you. I don't think it's gladness that I feel, but madness ! "

She says this last sentence in a whisper almost ; and he realises that, in the midst of her passionate pleasure in seeing him, there is a deep vein of hopelessness. Poor Olive !

"Does she know how utterly hopeless it all is?" he wonders; "does she know about Madge?"

As he is thinking this, Olive probes the part of the affair that gives her the most poignant pain.

"When are you going back to Moorbridge House, Mr. Fletcher?"

"Don't call me that!" he cries hastily. "I can bear a great deal; but 'Mr. Fletcher' from you, Olive, you won't——"

"When are you going back?" she interrupts, tottering almost on her feet as well as in her judgment.

"Why do you ask?"

"I heard what you said just before we were upset, the other day," she says rapidly, lifting her eyes to his face, and meeting the look that she knows has been in his eyes all along. "I heard what you

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said, and I suppose I know what it meant.”

“It meant young men’s chaff, Olive,” he says falteringly, for he is ashamed of himself for prevaricating so meanly. “You’re often hearing from Halsworthy, aren’t you ? Mrs. Henderson and Miss Roden have the name of being capital correspondents.”

“I have had one letter—only one—from Madge Roden,” she tells him ; and then she blushes fiercely and adds, “and that I tore up without reading, because——”

“Because of what ? ”

“Because I thought it might hold news that would hurt me ! ” she says impetuously ; and then he stifles the cries of his conscience, and resolves that she shall not hear of his engagement yet. She had tried to evade it—had confessed that she had tried to evade it ; wherefore, then, should he thrust it upon her ?

The blow must fall in time, but just a little longer it might be averted.

The agitation of her spirit is fretting and fatiguing her physically. She feels literally that every step taken exhausts her energies, and leaves her mentally and morally more at his mercy ; and she knows that he has none.

“ I have been walking for a long time, and I’m tired : I must go in.”

“ Do you mean this as a signal for my departure ? After *all*, is five minutes’ conversation with me all the grace you have for me now ? How lightly you women can let most things go ! ”

“ Don’t speak bitterly to me, Philip ! ” she says, trembling a little at the pathos he can put into his tones at an instant’s notice, and a little, also, with indignation at the calm audacity which enables him to cast the burden of his conduct upon her.

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“Don’t send me away, Olive ? Sit down on this bench, and let me tell you something. Yes, you must hear it, though perhaps you won’t be interested, and will think me a fool for my pains. I came down to the ‘Trafalgar,’ that day, solely with the hope of seeing you. I felt as if I couldn’t live without a sight of you, and I should have walked about Blackheath till it was granted me. Olive, why did you leave that photograph behind at Mrs. Wilmot’s ? ”

“It was left by accident ; and how did you know it was left at all ? ”

“It was given to me, and I forwarded it. That wretched woman flaunted it all over the market-place at Winstaple one day. Don’t you value it any more, Olive, that you leave it behind you carelessly, to be commented on by every idle tongue and vulgar mind ? ”

“Not value it ? It’s all that’s left to me,”

she says sorrowfully. Then she hates herself for what she calls the cowardice that causes her to linger by him just so long as he pleases.

The subject of Madge Roden has a painfully strong fascination for her. Surely, if Philip were engaged to Madge, he would tell her. That dreadful consummation has not been achieved yet. Still, though she tells herself this, she flutters back to the subject.

"When did you leave Halsworthy?"

"A fortnight ago."

"And how was Mrs. Henderson? Were they *all* quite well?"

"Quite well, thank you. Never mind Halsworthy now; tell me about yourself. Does that fool of a woman behave decently to you? Are you happy here, Olive?"

"Happy!" how can he ask her that? Why

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she couldn't be happy in a palace of which she was the queen, if he were not with her; and he knows it—he must know it. She manages to say,—

“ Yes, she is kind enough. When do you go back ? ”

“ Where to ? ”

“ Why to Halsworthy, of course ; we were talking of Halsworthy.”

“ Talk of something pleasanter, Olive,” he says eagerly ; and now he can't resist putting his hand on one of hers, which is resting on the back of the bench. With what wild joy that hand was once yielded up to him ! remembering this, how can he dare to touch it now ?

“ How *wrong* all this is ! ” she cries, starting up ; “ how weak and wicked I am ! ”

“ You weak and wicked, poor child ? ”

“ Yes, to let you make me such a slave.

Just think, if you had a sister, and any man tortured her as you do me !”.

“ I blame myself every hour of my life, Olive,” he says humbly ; “ you can’t say harder things of me than I think of myself.”

This self-depreciation of his brings her down again.

“ Oh, Philip ! don’t think I mean hard things ; but I get bewildered, and feel then that I must be awfully weak, or you wouldn’t treat me so.”

“ Let us be friends, if we can’t be more,” he says speciously. “ To lose you altogether out of my life is a little more than I can bear, and I’ve borne hard things in my time, dear. Let us be friends ; let me see you sometimes, and feel that you will turn to me as you would to a brother.”

A great dry sob rises up and chokes her ; the tortures of Tantalus can have been

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nothing to this. This is asking for bread, and being given a stone, with a vengeance.

“And when you marry, what will your wife think of our friendship—for you will marry, Philip?”

“If I said to you, ‘ You will marry and forget me, Olive, and be false to the claims of friendship I make upon you,’ would you not feel that I was unjust and cruel?” he asks in a hurt tone.

“Yes, because I am *I*; but you are *you*.” Then she collects all her strength; she interlaces her fingers, and presses them together to keep down any show of pain, and says,—

“Is it Madge?”

He is not prepared for the question; he had really thought that he had cleverly drawn a boundary line round the subject of himself and Olive, and that the latter would not overstep it. In his surprise he tells the truth.

“ Yes, it is.”

“ You are engaged to her ? ”

“ I am, Olive, my love ! ”

END OF VOL. I.







